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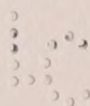
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OF KENSINGTON

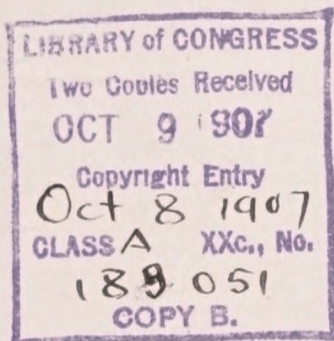
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By Mrs. Baillie Saunders



PAUL R. REYNOLDS
NEW YORK
1907

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A Shepherd of Kensington

CHAPTER I

"I WANT to see Mr. Cartyn," said the lady imperiously, as she wriggled up from a half-kneeling posture and collected by desperate seizings innumerable small bags, books, manuals, purses, and muff-chains.

The verger paused and looked scornful, but unspeakably resigned.

"The service is over, mum," he said, rattling a key-pocket in his shabby Geneva gown, and pulling a fringe of white hair under his shaven chin, a last stubbly reminiscence of the "New-gate" pattern. He was of ancient institution.

"I know that," said the lady sharply. "I stayed till all the people went, on purpose, as I wish to see him quite privately." Her eyes sparkled determination.

"I'll see whether he ain't gone," said the verger thoughtfully, thumbing a wax taper that he held, and examining a crack in it which caused it to hang its slender head down out of its holder like a limp signal-post, just as though he had never seen such a thing before.

"Well, please be quick," said the lady, while with one hand she fumbled at an opulent-looking beaded or rather jewelled bag. The action had stimulation in it.

"He's maybe just staying to sign some marriage sustifikits," said the verger in a kinder tone than before. "If I said it was *very* particular——"

There was a chink of coins, and suddenly one found itself absorbed with grace into the folds of the Geneva gown, and away whisked the verger through the drear grey-blue morning light towards the vestry, a new swagger in his old shoulders, clanking on the flags as he went.

The lady sat and waited, chinking her uncountable little dan-

gling things and minute beaded possessions, and fidgeting sufficiently to make several quite loud little frou-frous of the silk in her attire, which shot into the silent air with quite an effect of importance.

The service was just over, a weekday morning service in Lent in a church quite accurately described as "fashionable," and known as St. Chad's, South Kensington; and a large crowd of people had filed out of the building at the conclusion of the office, a crowd mainly composed of women, most of them of more or less well turned out appearance. This lady, in her corner, had remained since then without moving more than she could help—she was always on a little running move like corn with the wind on it, or a fussy beck on a gusty morning. She now rose up at the verger's beckoning, and went after him into the Tudor arch of the vestry door.

The vicar was busy writing at a table as she entered. He rose up at once and came towards her, gravely courteous, but clearly not cordial. He seemed to have plenty of business of his own, and his manner was expressive of a desire to hurry these tiresome applications on one side. He evidently found his power a nuisance in this way: surely, he seemed to be saying impatiently to himself, these good ladies could get all they wanted in church without following him in here. He was a neat, rather smart-looking man, of medium height and very thin, with plain features shown sharply out of a thin, narrow face, and possessing the strange incongruity of a very boyishly shaped head going prematurely grey about the temples. He had an odd, almost mahogany-coloured skin, and a tightly shut mouth. His only good features were that and his blue eyes; otherwise he was distinctly plain, and rather irritatingly self-confident in manner with more the air of a man conducting a brisk business than a spiritual adviser.

"I want your advice," said the lady bluntly.

"Yes——?" he began.

"Spiritual," said the lady, taking the offered seat. "A fault—a—a—a sin committed," she continued, fumbling again amongst her muff-chains and manuals and bead bags, this time in real confusion, but creating an odd air of flippancy by her jingles.

He looked politely displeased, and, clearing his throat, spoke in a voice sounding faintly like a chant.

"If there is any help I can give you——" he began again, and pushed aside his papers with finality. He was about thirty-five a fairly young man for a vicar, and had only quite recently acquired the important living he now held, and was at the time deep in several of the puzzles that beset the orthodox and eager and young and tidy in an overwhelmingly disordered and confusing world. One was, certainly, his duty with regard to the fashionable women who flocked to his church, and whose puzzling ethics necessarily bewildered a man fresh from the cut-and-dried metaphysics of Oxford and the comparatively simple troubles of the poor. He had had ten years in the slums, and was not married. How little, then, could he know of the human nature that mattered to his country! This lady was certainly one of a type that he felt obliged to consider, as it was constantly troubling his path. He took it strictly as a penance, with some impatience, not unnatural. She was young as women go now—over thirty, and tall and largely made, with handsome curtly cut features, golden-brown hair, and fine eyes spoilt by some temper and more good living, and a complexion certainly suffering from a tendency to mauvy-red and puffiness due to the same unromantic cause. A little less of her would have been an advantage; otherwise she was certainly pretty, and appeared to know it. The vicar hardly got all this in detail, but he got its effect which is the same, or a better thing: he also got a little thrill of distaste from the lady's dress, which can only be described as a sort of Lenten coquetry—rich purple, most sweepingly made, with many sable furs and ornaments and a toque of violets. An amethyst cross rested on her breast, symbolical of the whole.

"Would you like to speak to me now," he said, "or make an appointment for some other time? I am afraid I am due at a committee meeting in twenty minutes. But still——"

"Oh no, now please," said the lady. "If I don't say it now I never shall. I've been coming to these nice mission services and things, and have really felt all sorts of things—good things—ideas, you know, that I never had before. Of course, it's very tiresome. These notions—well, one gets them, only they don't last. Well, p'raps it would be a bore if they did. No one decent would really invite one, would they? One would get a name for being solemn. And when I smell incense I do feel so—so,

oh lovely. And I read heaps of little books with such nice, sweet, impossible sort of ideas in them, the sort of things you would do willingly if you were in a book, only that wouldn't go down in your set, you know. Haven't you—no, I suppose clergymen haven't—but hasn't one to consider one's set? Isn't that duty to one's neighbours and so on? It must be. Really, life is very puzzling."

"And you want me to give you some particular advice?" said Cartyn, trying to keep to the point and glancing furtively at his watch.

"Well, yes. I suppose you would call this confession—or wouldn't you?"

"I suppose any unburdening of a troubled mind in the sincere desire to do better is confession."

"Oh, well, this thing bothers me," said the lady; "and I love your sermons so——" The vicar raised a hand. "And all these dear charming services, where one can get such really nice feelings, have made me feel much more uncomfortable about it, though it's really what lots of women do every day of their lives. I expect crowds of my friends have done it to me; I've no doubt I've suffered for it over and over again. I don't know why I came here now about it except that it's a bother to me, and makes me unlucky at bridge. And when I really try to be like those little books, it gets between me and the altar-lights in a quite horrid way, and makes me hate the frumps who sing so loud in church because no doubt they have nothing unpleasant on their consciences. It's odd how that makes one hate them."

The vicar, after one keen glance at her, had now turned his chair and seated himself sideways to the lady with his elbow resting on the table and his hand up to his face, in order that he should not appear to study her, or embarrass her by an intrusion of his own personality or regard.

"Pray speak out. Do not think you need to reason with," he said it almost awkwardly, "with your Heavenly Father. Tell the fact, if it troubles you, and we will see, you and I together, what can be done." Some of the haste of his manner had gone and now his coldly impersonal tone calmed the fidgeting lady.

"Well, then," she said in a lower voice, "as a matter of fact it is a—well a scandal. A very bad scandal. I practically invented it. Oh, I don't say there wasn't ground for it—or, rather

she was indiscreet. But I did it because—well, because I was jealous. But it's this way, I only meant it to go so far; but—well, it's gone dreadfully far. Oh, I can't, I won't, think how far. It's done for her heaps of harm. It makes me hate her and myself too—she's like a ghost: we're both like ghosts! I feel mad to get away from both of us, and I don't much care which I hurt. I've come here to hurt myself, for a change from her. I feel as if I'd stuck a knife into her and must now stick one into myself. Oh, why are things so difficult?"

"You say," said Cartyn gravely, "that you brought a scandal against a friend? Was it a friend?"

"Yes, sort of. Yes, till I hated her—then she was an enemy."

"Why did you hate her?"

"Oh well, why?—Because she was so pretty in a sort of horribly superior way, and every one fell in love with her, even the man I cared about. That was really why I did it."

The lady was fidgeting with her rings and breathing quickly.

"And what did you do?"

"Well, you see, she married him; the man I mean. It was out in India—Bahore—where he had a Government post. I was living at the same place—I must tell you I am the widow of an officer—because my late husband had been stationed there when he died, and I remained there amongst my large circle of friends. We led a gay life, this man was quite mine—that is, we were almost engaged, and he would have married me, when she came along. She was quite young—a mere girl—people called her beautiful; she was decently born, but she had no money or anything, but he fell in love with her, though he was old enough to be her father. He threw me quite on one side and married her. He had never been strong, and after his marriage his health gave way altogether, and he gradually became a confirmed invalid. He used to take morphia—you know what those tropical climates are; and you may perhaps know how easy it was to make a man under those circumstances jealous and suspicious."

"Of his wife?" said Cartyn.

"Yes—his young wife. You see, she was a beauty, and you know what India is for young and pretty women! He was rich and had many friends, but his illness cut him off from them bit by bit—only not his wife. He had an idea that she ought to go into society all the more because he couldn't, to represent

him, you see? She did. And then was my chance. I was an old friend, his old sweetheart, really. I expect clergymen think nothing of these things, but they matter very much to real people. I had been horribly insulted, almost jilted for her. I had been pitied by every woman—I was going to say cat—that I knew, and made a laughing-stock! No one could have forgiven it. Now that he was a wretched, ill-humoured invalid I had his ear. I can't go into it any more. But partly through real circumstances and partly through his own mean suspicions—morphia does make you horrid!—he was only too ready to be down on his silly schoolgirl of a wife, with her plainly done hair and horrid pianoforte solos. Anyhow a case did get itself up against her—no, I didn't *get* it up, I only fostered it—through her being silly, indiscreet in some way, all very trifling. I even now hardly recollect the ins and outs of it all. And that's what I had to tell you. I fostered the idea, I made it seem very sure, and fixed it in his mind. And—and I'm sorry now that I did." There was a pause.

"Why are you sorry?" The vicar's voice came solemnly out of the grey vestry shadows.

"Why? Oh, well, because I don't feel angry any more now. Especially as he's dead. He died on the voyage home, five years ago. Besides, he got so horrid with that morphia that nobody would have wanted him in the end. Besides, it went too far; it did her much more harm than I meant—ever so much—that's the sting of it. And I'm horribly unlucky at bridge, and one puts it down to that—one must, I suppose; an evil conscience, and all the rest of it. And your nice church and those calm sort of hymns making one feel early-morningy, and funny in the wrong places, and life altogether being so muddling—oh well, there are lots of reasons why I should be utterly miserable. I am utterly miserable—about it. Besides——" she paused and ground her two ringed hands together and made a diamond and an emerald grate horribly against one another; "besides, I saw her in church last night, and I've had no sleep."

"You saw her—here—in church?"

"Yes, in this church. I'd lost sight of her for years—ever since they left India. I didn't know—not quite really, you know—what had happened to her. People said things. But I forgot it—tried to. I had forgotten it very nearly when I saw her in

front of me last night. Oh, it's awful——" She suddenly burst into a violent passion of tears, rocking herself to and fro wildly, but keeping her seat. Cartyn heard her sobs with the frightened feeling at his heart that worries most decent men to whom these experiences come. He wanted to get up and say something kind and stop it somehow, anyhow. But he remembered his sacred office, and forebore the heartier action, only saying—

"There, there, now. Now calm yourself. There—there is no hurry."

But still the silk-clad lady rocked herself to and fro and seemed unable to speak for wretchedness. He waited a few moments and then spoke again.

"Now tell me, if you wish," he said, "why it was so awful?"

The sobs wavered a little. "She was so shabby," she said incoherently. "Her clothes—they were so ugly. She had on common gloves, horrid gloves that pretend to be suede and are really cotton. Oh, it was that!—it was those gloves that made me mad, I——"

"But why?" said the clergyman. He wavered helplessly in intuition. His bachelorhood and Oxford and the slums here failed him desperately.

"Why? Can't you see? That smart, lovely Mary Fre—— oh, I had nearly said her name, and I believe I mustn't in an interview like this? To think that she should have come down to that through *me*."

"Through you?" His voice was sharper.

"Yes, don't you see? Oh, no, I didn't finish. I told you her husband got angry with her and got to hate her and think ill of her? Well, when he died suddenly on the homeward voyage it was found that he had left a most hateful will—he had left her with only fifty pounds a year so long as her character remained uncleared of this wretched story. Until then her share was to remain in abeyance in the hands of trustees; but if, in the opinion of these trustees the matter could be put right, her income would revert back to her. Do you see? It was infamous! I told you he was rich. But this is what he did to his widow, who has practically no living relations to protect her. And all through this ridiculous talk that had less than nothing in it!"

"I suppose there was some foundation for it?"

"Oh no. It referred vaguely to her actions in connection with

one acquaintance they had, and a rather oddly twisted set of circumstances. She had been careless—she was only a girl with no mother, only a widower father when they married, and she probably hardly knew the world—the hill-station world,” she added significantly.

“And for this she is left a practical pauper?”

“Yes.”

“Through you?”

“Well, if you like—yes, through me.”

There was a long silence. The clock in the outer vestry ticked uncomfortably, and an ash fell shudderingly in the grate. The bell in the tower began rumbling and reverberating with its strenuous machinery before it got up the energy to strike one o'clock; somebody outside the thick stone walls went by on a motor loudly blowing an ugly horn. But here all was shadow and echo.

“And you mean to say,” said Cartyn very quietly, and in a controlled voice that he purposely kept free from every hint of censoriousness, “that you saw your—your victim here, bearing the signs of poverty in her dress, and that you were overcome with remorse for what you had done?”

“Yes.”

“And you want the Church’s forgiveness?”

“Yes.”

“Then you must first of all restore what you have taken away.”

“Restore it? How?”

“That must be discussed. But in so far as you can you must make practical reparation to her!”

The lady, who had been mopping her wet eyes, now shot up to her full height unexpectedly.

“Oh no,” she said, very hurriedly; “that is impossible. That I cannot do.”

“You cannot? Why?”

“I cannot go into that old affair again. The man is dead. The thing is over. I might give her some money, if that is what you mean. I could do that. I am what some people call rich. I would settle so much a year on her, so that she needn’t wear those horrid gloves, but—oh no—I can’t make that old story public now. It is utterly impossible.”

“You say she is innocent?”

"Oh, of course. She was never in the wrong. That's her tiresome way."

"And she—innocent—is to go on suffering frightful disgrace and shame and poverty to save your *amour propre*?"

"Oh, clergymen put things so wrongly. She has, I tell you, got on well enough for five years. She can go on doing so quite well, especially if I make the reparation I suggest. She need not know who gives her the money—lawyers, or somebody, could settle it on her without her knowing. But beyond that I will not go. I cannot say any more. You ask impossibilities. You do not know the world."

"I am the minister of another, in which you come to me asking for peace," he said. But it was the first time the fact had really struck him as a practical, working matter, and he said it a little lamely.

"Oh, certainly. But I could get it by lifting her from poverty, surely?"

"You can only get it by confessing your sin and making full reparation. Money will not do it. You must restore to her her character. That is clear."

"Then I refuse!" Her voice was angry and final.

"We will pray about it."

"No—not now. I am too upset. I thought you understood life better. They always said you were not narrow. That was why I came to you. You may think it easy for me to talk to you like this, but I assure you it is very unpleasant and tiresome indeed. I assure you I have had a miserable morning, quite miserable enough to satisfy God, I should think?"

"God does not want misery," said Cartyn sternly, "but repentance and straight, kind deeds. Then comes happiness and only then. But you are overwrought and tired. Go home and rest now, and be glad that you have gone so far in the right way as to try and unburden your poor mind of this wretchedness. You have that to console you. Later on either you can come and talk to me again, or I will come to you—as you like."

The lady was putting on her boa and fastening her mauve gloves. She looked disturbed and dishevelled, but resolute.

"I will write, Mr. Cartyn," she said. "My name is Courtman—Mrs. Courtman, of 16 Darnley Gardens—I will think out a plan. But the one you suggest is utterly impossible. I can trust

you, I suppose, to regard this conversation as sacred—as sacred as a confession?”

“Most certainly,” he answered. “It shall never pass my lips. I am bound by my office to regard it in that way.”

He said a few words more, trying to advise her, and let the unhappy creature go. Then he put on his hat and coat and left the church for his large lonely vicarage, his mind full of the story of passion and hatred he had given ear to. He had of course missed his committee meeting, and had to hurry through with his lunch, as a busy afternoon awaited him. But all the day his mind travelled back again and again to the confused drama into which he had got a glimpse, to the fevered, angry woman, half-penitent and half-hardened, who refused to do the one thing that would make her emotional sorrow of any avail whatever.

It was an odd story, and had about it almost a note of exaggeration, and he wondered a little whether the lady was not rather hysterical about it, and inclined to overstate things. Such a tendency would fit in well with that Lenten fancy dress. He was ever of a hard and fast common sense, and some of the features of this affair puzzled him even to a sense of annoyance. After all, he said, honour was honour, and if women outraged its plain code what was the good of coming to a busy parson and then refusing his advice?

The innermost ethics of feminine troubles had always been regarded by him with something of a schoolboy's contempt, and very much the same measure of ignorance. This time they annoyed him.

Then one evening, as he was finishing a rather cheerless bachelor supper in his big vicarage dining-room, his man-servant came in to announce a visitor, come according to appointment—a certain Mrs. Fresne.

Yes, he recollected, a matter of a reference or something; but he got up with sudden alertness from his bleak supper-table at the mention of the name. This was only a poor lady, quite young, who earned her living in some remote way connected with literature, and whom he had only known for two months or so, through some parochial affair or other. But her face had haunted him oddly, and half out of curiosity to find out why, he said he was now glad to see her again. He took the trouble

to brush himself down in the hall before going into his little bare waiting-room to which such parochial applicants were consigned, and made a mental note that he needed some new cuffs not quite so much inclined to fringes at the edge.

Mrs. Fresne rose as he entered the room, and timidly took the hand he offered. She was certainly interesting, though her dress was plain and shabby, and her manner the last to court attention. She looked about twenty-eight, but a settled paleness and gravity, as of some hidden sadness, gave her at a distance the appearance of being older. Her face was one of strange charm, very wide at the upper part, and tapering to a small chin that, grave as she was, had that quaint little cleft in it which is sometimes said to denote a nature meant for love. Her eyes were grey and set rather deeply, and her brown hair was wavy and parted thickly under the dull severity of her ugly little hat; she had a certain roundness and fulness of build which suited the character of her beauty, and robbed her plain neutral clothes of their chief ugliness.

"I'm so sorry," she said, in a low contralto voice, rather timidly. "But I could not come any other time, as I earn my living—I think you know? It is only these papers, Mr. Cartyn—if you would sign them for me; they need a clergyman's reference."

He expressed his willingness, and took a quill out of a tin ink-stand on his little baize-covered table, and turned up the one gas-jet a little higher. He felt eager and pleased to be of use to the gentle-voiced, half-apologetic creature.

"Please read them," she said, "if you like. But I am only trying for the post of secretary to a ladies' club; it is almost settled that I shall have it, through the good influence of Lady Jiberene, who has very kindly pushed my cause with the committee. It only needs a merely formal reference from you."

He glanced over the papers.

"Shall I say anything—as to knowing you, or anything of that sort?" he said.

"Oh, I hardly think it necessary, thank you. All that is wanted is your reference as to my identity and place of abode," she smiled rather sadly, and added, as she passed him some further papers, "those prove my identity, and you already know my abode. I think it is in your very poorest district?"

When she smiled the cleft of her chin was more clearly a

dimple; she must once have been a merry girl, for even now, when she alluded to her poverty, her sad eyes had a sort of sparkle that shone bravely even under the bleak light of the waiting-room gasjet.

Cartyn smiled back at her and took the papers, as a mere form

"Then you must mean to win my interest by storm," he said jestingly; "for I have a particular affection for that district. You've got all the unspoilt human nature there, anyhow!"

He was glancing over the papers as he spoke, or rather pretending to do so. He handed them back to her almost at once. He had been chiefly struck by the fact that her Christian name was Mary, which seemed strangely to suit her. Also that she was the widow of an Indian judge, a fact that astonished him a little in face of her forlorn position of frank poverty, though he had always known her to be a lady who had been monetarily unfortunate.

"I see you know Bahore?" he said.

"Yes. Do you?" she said, rather sharply, as though a little startled by his allusion.

"Oh no. I only heard of some one from there—rather a tragic story—the other day. That was why I was interested." Mrs Fresne had risen and was collecting her papers.

"It is a place," she said very quietly, and with a vibrating bitterness in her low tones, "of infinite tragedy—for me."

He glanced at her as he too rose.

"I am sorry to hear it," he said. "Perhaps sometime you will confide in me? If I can ever be of use to you I shall be really glad."

She smiled again, as though sorry for her outburst. "Oh, you are kind," she said. "I am grateful, but I have very few friends, and for the present cannot make new ones, for reasons I cannot explain now. I keep very quiet, for life has been a hard struggle since my husband died on the homeward voyage from there, five years ago. But things are getting on better now——"

"Your husband died on the homeward voyage from Bahore—five years ago?" His tone was sudden and eager.

"Yes, on the *Eclat*. Why do you ask?"

Cartyn did not reply. He was gazing at her, while a rush of puzzling notions filled his mind to the exclusion of her question.

Mrs. Courtman's story!—the Indian civilian who had died on

the homeward voyage; the young wife since condemned to disgraceful poverty; the name his penitent had unwittingly half let fall—"Mary Fre——"; the wretched mockery of an annuity of fifty pounds, which the persual of this woman's papers had just revealed to him. It all agreed in a strange fashion. Bewildered and strangely grieved, he did not reply for a moment; had he made a discovery?

His visitor's face had gone white under the gasjet, and her lips tightened. Possibly she misunderstood his silence.

"I will bid you good-night," she said primly, inclining her head and hurriedly collecting her papers and gloves and making for the door.

He hurried to open it and held out his hand to her, eagerly beginning to explain as well as he could; but she managed to give the impression that her own hands were too busily employed to take his, and with a bow and a low word of thanks passed swiftly out into the cold spring night, not before, however, Cartyn saw that her wide eyes were wet with tears.

Closing the door he turned back to go to his study, and saw that she had dropped her glove on the tiled hall floor in her hurry to get away.

He picked it up and examined it under the heavy ecclesiastical lamp that gave dim, uncomfortable light to his cloisterlike residence. The glove was a pale brownish thing, cottony to the touch, with a sort of dull surface.

"I wonder if this," said Cartyn to himself, "is what they call imitation suede that is really cotton? Because if so, this thing has roused one woman's selfish heart to confession, and told me another's life-story!"

He went to his study taking it with him. But he could not work. Outside a spring blizzard lashed against his window-panes and drowned the roar of traffic and the distant cries of street vendors in a neighbouring mean street where Mary Fresne lived. He sat alone staring at the fire, wide-eyed at the odd problem that faced him: he had in his hands the secret that could restore this most unfortunate woman to her rights; yet the seal of confession forbade him to speak of it, even to her. It was a sudden and astonishing responsibility thrust into his hands, without his dreaming of it, or being in the least prepared for it.

"Truly extraordinary!" he remarked in his official sing-song voice. Then, suddenly forgetting this and dropping into the tones of an average Englishman, he said, "Regularly funny!" He swung down with a bang and shut up a handsomely bound copy of *Instructions on the Doctrinal Illogicality of the Peccable*, by Father Pick. It was a fine work, leaving ordinary faulty persons not a leg to stand upon, not a feather to cover them. It pulled their position to pieces, and scattered the bits to the four winds. But somehow to-night he could not get into it altogether. Clever as it was, the illogical peccable were still there hammering at his heart. So he turned rather helplessly to a black pipe even more reminiscent of Oxford. "Odd things women do. And men," he added, as an afterthought. "Of course, it's all the want of a sound Church life. If we could get sound dogma inculcated everywhere, these passions and things wouldn't be—there, what an odd, delicate face! And what a history. Pretty, gentle creature. And the other woman. What a contrast! But this is sheer waste of an evening I had meant to devote to study; this sort of thing spoils a man's work. Really, if it were not for human nature how well the Church could get on! That is the difficulty!"

As he said it the sweet eyes of the wronged woman came like two stars between him and the printed page. Human nature again. Really, how annoying!

CHAPTER II.

"ANY more business to-day, Miss Grogan?" said the lady with a veil like a blanket flopped over her severe hat, in a voice curt with self-assurance. The meeting was being distinctly "rushed."

"No. Done," said Miss Grogan, as she turned over some books and papers decisively with fingers of a business-like dinginess.

"Oh yes, one thing," she said. "That affair about the new club secretary." She glanced round at the ladies' committee, twenty or so, sitting in a half-circle and chattering undisguisedly, as the morning's meeting was over, and the tongues were joyously loosened; the true business, to them, had now really begun.

"Ladies," she said, "I need hardly remind you that this applicant for the post of secretary, the widow of an Indian judge, a Mrs. Fresne, has been most ably seconded and recommended by Lady Jiberene. Her papers have now come in fully signed and in order, with references from Mr. Calvin Hopper (a well-known editor), and the Rev. James Cartyn, Vicar of St. Chad's, South Kensington, and others. I think we need hardly go further into the matter. I imagine all are agreed in accepting Lady Jiberene's candidate? Those who are in favour—er—um—hands up!"

Her air of finality was as persuasive as her piercingly thin voice and pinched nose were intimidating. The ladies of the Hoyden Club committee were used to their chairman, and, knowing her many prickles, forbore to say much aloud, though much was privately muttered, and yet more significant things were fluttered. It is astonishing what an eyelash or even a flower toque can do in that way; and there were some flower toques present, though the general taste ran rather to a semi-aesthetic utility in the way of costume, as the club's general aim was to be literary. It "ran" in a fashionable street in the West End, and had a large array of members; originally solely literary it now announced itself with delightful ambiguity as a club

"for women who do things," and as most women do things of one sort or another—chiefly unnecessary—a large army made easy claims to membership, and got in in triumph.

One lady had entered its portals through having written a prize-essay on bee-keeping some fifteen years ago; and another, less literary than altruistic, had distinguished herself by a successful lawsuit with a publisher; some came because they did art needlework, and wanted a place to which they could invite rather limp men to tea, without impropriety; and others because they wanted to make fun of these as a pastime. But they were all very happy, or would have been except for one lady, whose reason for getting herself elected was the most gallant of all. She had heard that the club had two distinct parties in it (much more distinct than those in the House of Commons) and she cheerfully contributed her presence and her wealth in order that she might set those two parties dancing! In the case of this lady her claim to entrance into the club was less because she had done things in the past than because she hoped to do them in the future; and of her it can truly be said that she earned her right to the club's motto, "Do and dare," before she had been forty-eight hours within its walls. Peace had ceased with her admission.

She now put up a benevolent countenance crowned by venerable grey hair (it was an odd characteristic of this lady that she looked benevolent and venerable, and was the utter opposite of either) and with her two little oblique slits of eyes beaming a deceptive geniality, said, "Is Lady Jiberene our nursing mother?"

Her thin, insinuating voice penetrated the chatter and turned all eyes to the speaker, who was now thoroughly happy, and who beamed out of a fur coat of something stripy and brownish grey, uncommonly like a tabby puss in effect.

Miss Grogan pinched up her tiny face into so many lines that she appeared to have crinkled herself suddenly into a Chinese lantern. This was her most ominous smile, and it always meant mischief.

"Dear Lady Jiberene hardly claims that position, Mrs. Gigshaw," she said with wicked distinctness. "Her years would point her to be rather the granddaughter of certain of us, though

her seniority both of membership and social position give her rights no one of taste would dispute."

Instead of looking crushed at this ghastly rebuke, Mrs. Gigshaw appeared quite delighted at the turn her own impertinence had taken, and glanced gladly round the assembly, with fat ringed hands folded, and a strangely rakish Parisian hat all on one side, as if to say, "There, I told you I could make them dance!"

Another lady, young and rosy-faced, in a kind of golfing costume with a hanging belt, and her hands in her side pockets, now spoke up, emboldened by Mrs. Gigshaw's pucklike move.

"May I suggest, Miss Grogan," she said, throwing back a boyish head in a boyish way, not altogether without attractiveness, "that the committee have not so far been introduced to the applicants for this post? Ought we not to see them? Or have you seen them?"

She put her questions like so many balls shot at a ninepin and as Miss Grogan, with her Dutch-doll coiffure and hock-bottle shaped shoulders, was not unlike a ninepin, one got an idea of a naughty boy having a game in school, and expected instinctively the wrath to come.

"Lady Jiberene and myself were satisfied, Miss Hyde," she said stiffly. "And as she is not present it was hardly deemed necessary—— If, however, you insist—and the rest of the committee express a similar wish—I can send for Mrs. Fresne, who is now waiting to hear our decision; also for the other applicant, Miss Jacques' nomination."

She uttered the last sentence with so much scorn that even an outsider, unused to the Hoyden and its politics, would have been struck by the sense of some ulterior significance. As a matter of fact, Miss Jacques was no other than the head of the great party which constituted itself a public rival to that of Lady Jiberene; and just as Miss Grogan, the chairman, was Lady Jiberene's voluntary agent and supporter-in-chief, so Miss Hyde was Miss Jacques'.

But Mrs. Gigshaw, who was the one unconquerable free lance, put in cheerfully, "Let's toss up for 'em!"

Nobody heeding this vulgar suggestion, Mrs. Gigshaw continued to smile obliquely and concoct fresh "digs" to administer to the rival parties, and a messenger was sent to the waiting-

room for the two lady applicants. Women really only bore patiently with Mrs. Grigshaw because she was so ugly, and she said she was rich.

In a few moments the two applicants came in, walking up as directed to the table at which Miss Grogan sat erect, with every eye upon them, poor souls, their faces grave and self-conscious, as well they might be under such a hideous ordeal.

Mrs. Fresne walked in second, being preceded by a dark-haired, square-shouldered little lady of far more self-confident aspect, whose clothes were considerably better and who wore gold spectacles which somehow seemed to protect her from criticism. Perhaps something in the drooping serious head of tall, quiet Mary, or a slight flush that rose painfully to her soot cheek, appealed to one of the ladies of the committee of more delicate sensibilities (for others) than her sisters, for she certainly turned hurriedly aside and said to a neighbour—

"I cannot look at poor ladies on approval, can you?"

"No," said the neighbour, also a little abashed. "It is not good taste for the committee to permit it. But it is not Miss Grogan's fault, is it? She was not going to allow it, only Miss Hyde interfered."

The first speaker, a pretty woman and the mother of a large family said impatiently:

"Miss Hyde is too young, and too hard to understand these matters! I'm blushing for those two poor things—look, it shows! It must. Don't you feel sorry for them? Oh, isn't it horrid to stare so, when any one of us might have to earn our living in just the same way! How rude, how vulgar, how heartless women are!"

"They are horrid," said the other. "People are horribly vulgar when one really sees them in a natural state. A committee meeting is a very natural state—it is raw human nature undisguised."

"Oh," cried the first lady indignantly, "Mrs. Gigshaw is picking up her lorgnette! Oh, this is too much."

She got up and rustled fussily up to the chairwoman, unable to bear it any longer.

"Dear Miss Grogan," she said coaxingly in a whisper. "Shall we not ask these two applicants to go now? Don't you think Lady Jiberene would really rather?"

The appeal had its effect. Miss Grogan nodded, and, bowing to Mary and her companion, dismissed them not unwillingly. But the pretty little lady slipped round, and by making some pleasant remarks managed to get between the two applicants and quite naturally to escort them to the door, as though seeing two guests out of a drawing-room, chattering as she went. At the door she shook hands with both, as though quite in the ordinary run of things, and came back to her seat flushed and shy, but triumphant. A few women weakly tittered.

"Well?" said Mrs. Gigshaw, addressing creation, "Hoyden" creation—generally.

"I vote for the beauty! She'll make such a bother all round. See if she doesn't. The other woman is too dull and sensible to be interesting, anyway. We don't come here for repose. Dear no!"

The buzz of comment and conversation was great enough to drown her, however, and very various were the opinions expressed by the members. A few, who had lately supported Lady Jiberene, were now distinctly piqued because she had not told them that her nominee was pretty, a serious omission; and on the matter being put to vote many went over to Miss Jacques' candidate solely on that account. Nevertheless, Lady Jiberene's popularity was so far ahead of Miss Jacques'—she was of no family and entertained vastly, and Miss Jacques was of ancient lineage and didn't—that when the votes were counted there was a distinct majority for Mrs. Fresne, another triumph for the Jibereneites. An official letter was sent to South Kensington notifying the engagement.

The next morning the Vicar of St. Chad's, coming into the vicarage rather blue of face from an early service and walk through an easterly wind, found amongst his letters one from Mrs. Fresne. It was addressed in large, rapid-looking handwriting, and signed with rather a flourish for a letter of meek thanks from a penurious widow in distress. He laughed shortly to himself as he read it.

"Well, she's very grateful for nothing," he said. "And the way she just dashes at that 'Dear Mr. Cartyn' gives one quite an idea of that Beauty of Bahore business. Oh, no doubt the story is all true enough. I'm determined to see that other woman again. It's clearly one's duty."

He took off the overcoat that he had a fancy to wear over his cassock in turning out for his morning offices. It gave him a nice secure priestly feeling, besides being warm. And when rude boys shouted remarks in the streets he strode along the more firmly, feeling that he was suffering for the faith by this token.

This Lenten morning, fresh from the stern chaste solitudes of the half-darkened church, he was stung not only by east wind, but by a thin little lash of conscience—he called it worry—that he had been rather too summary with his penitent of a few days ago. His essentially English temperament hated “scenes” and emotions, and this fact, combined with the suddenness of the lady’s entrance and startling tale, had taken him unawares. Perhaps he had not sufficiently considered the affair from her point of view, and had prescribed too quickly or too harshly. The Church could not always be considering the fads of these creatures.

“But Heaven knows I’m not her judge, or any one’s,” he said to himself with some impatience. “If I gave her the impression that I thought so, or that I was too pressing about her making a reparation, I’ll go and try to put things less severely. Poor soul, she seemed miserable enough, and it’s no good expecting an ultraheroic action at that stage of her trouble. I’ll write at once.”

He did so, suggesting an interview if she wished, in as friendly a tone as he was warranted to take under the circumstances. For all his pre-conceived ideas about bustling women and their nonsense out of the way of serious work, this case remained strangely fixed in his imagination, and he could not quite put it on one side. Mrs. Courtman replied at once. She would be so very glad to see Mr. Cartyn; she named a day in the following week, pleading engagements for the moment. Her letter was on large mauve notepaper, written in violet ink, in an immense splashing hand. She said she was *very* miserable, underlined, and that Life was so puzzling, with capitals, and he was really *so* good to try to help her out of all her Troubles. She signed it with a great flourish, “Yours miserably, Florence Courtman.” The strong violet scent that emanated from it rather got on his nerves; but he retained his somewhat difficult attitude of sternly trying to do his part, and fixed the appointment.

Two days before it was due, he was hurrying along the main road on a Saturday afternoon on his way to a small clerical conference, an affair got up locally to discuss some question referring to the reading of the Bible during Divine service. The chairman was to be an elderly and learned personage, who had stooped for the moment from his Oxford lectureship to pronounce finally that all public reading of the church lessons, that was not entirely incomprehensible to the congregation, was pernicious. Cartyn, with a faint secret twinge of some dissentient feeling, which he called heresy, was going loyally to support this school of opinion. He felt it due to his orthodoxy.

But away along the crowded street, in all the racing muddle of traffic, he became aware of a gorgeous mass of spring flowers, heaped up, as it appeared, in a great flaming bank of colour. It caught his eye at the same moment that the bent head of a stooping lady, apparently standing in the midst of the flowers, lightly caught his interest. It was a glorious spring afternoon, and the dazzling silvery sunshine glittered on the "kinks" in the lady's hair. She did not see him. She was busy buying flowers from the mountainous vendor in a red check apron, who, with her wares, occupied the kerb.

He glanced at his watch. The spring airs danced by gaily. He thought of the dark, stuffy meeting in support of the obscuring of spiritual truth. He thought of his own rule of avoiding women, as beings unwise, useless, and provocative of all trouble. He thought of the complicated network of discussion he was going to. He felt the passionate candour of the spring.

Mary Fresne turned and saw him, and blushed to her neck.

He put his watch in his pocket.

"So you have started your new duties?" he said, laughing suddenly. The laugh was at himself. It was half-ashamed. When he laughed he had a curious trick of half-shutting his eyes and looking deprecatingly at the speaker. It was quite unconscious, but it had a boyish, almost mischievous charm. She laughed at it.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Oh, you have a happy air as of one released from Hoydens—wasn't that the name of the club?"

"Yes, that is it. But I assure you I am more happy because I

get on with them so well than because they let a substitute take my place on Saturdays."

"Are they decent, then?"

"Oh, really genial. I have hardly been there a fortnight, but I am already feeling the satisfaction of working amongst—well, comparatively cultivated women. I assure you it is the sense of that which makes all the difference in life."

She spoke with a kind of easy cheerfulness, as though it were a perfectly ordinary thing for a lady of education and position to be glad to occupy a subordinate post in a collection of all sorts and conditions of women. Cartyn had turned with her when she paid for her violets and narcissus and walked along by her side in the fussing, crowded street, full of eager people glad of Saturday afternoon and some sudden spring sunshine, and was now lingering with her at the expense of some jostlings from the passers-by, and a certain necessity to shout his remarks in her ear in order to be heard above the din of traffic. He felt quite ridiculously boyish. He said it was the spring, in his own mind.

"You advertise it, anyhow," he said, glancing at the curving outline of her cheek, still pinky from the encounter, and noticing her brisk, confident walk, as she pushed her way along the street carrying her soft heap of fragrant flowers with a certain comely pride. "You look better already."

"Oh well," she said, "after hard times one ought to look well on prosperity."

"Prosperity!" He recollected suddenly the meagre club salary, and the tiny annuity with a sort of pang of indignation. He could not have told with whom he was indignant—Florence Courtman, partly, but perhaps more with the dead husband who had believed evil of this brave being of purity and sunshine, this clear-eyed, almost merry creature, as she appeared to-day, buying her week-end flowers for a few pence, and going gaily along the common High Street and talking about 'prosperity.'

"I've got half an hour to spare," he said, looking at his watch; "can't I come and pay you a call, if you are going home? You are never in at proper calling hours, you know, and I've never done my pastoral duty in that way, have I?"

She almost stopped with surprise and faced him, a look of undisguised bewilderment in her eyes.

"Aren't we close to your home?" he continued, seeing the look.

"Oh, yes, quite near. But—it's very stupid and common—and——"

"And what? Aren't you 'At Home' to-day?"

She laughed, but uneasily.

"No, well, I'm not, am I? I suppose that's true so long as I stay out here. But I was only thinking——" A barrel organ close to them here struck up a blatantly vulgar tune, almost deafening them and making speech impossible.

Mrs. Fresne shook her head and laughed in whimsical despair. They had arrived at the corner of a common turning called Loder Street, and Cartyn remembered that it was the one she lived in. There was a large bird-fancier's at the corner, and endless feathered singers in cages hung all round it outside and in, whistling madly to the sunshine and the barrel organ. A row of cages full of tame rabbits stood in front of the shop. Cartyn's eye was caught and rested on one, a solitary beast in a cage by himself, a large ginger-coloured rabbit. He had clear, stern eyes, and upright ears, and his rich golden coat shaded off to his white paws and a little white tail, all of which Cartyn observed as the creature sat chewing something out of his paws and rather scornfully studying him. It was a silly thing to notice, but the spring and that forgotten schoolboy sense of humorous adventure had got into his blood, and this warm-coloured creature took his fancy as something out of a fairy-book—the large rabbit guarding the portals of the fairy princess, or something fantastic in that way. As they paused to let the crowd go by this fluffy animal appeared to gaze back at him with a kind of mysterious intelligence that was rather weird and wholly laughable, so that he laughed outright, and he and Mary were still in a somewhat inconsequent and merry mood when they arrived at the house she called her lodgings.

Here were no further guardian rabbits, and she entered with a latchkey, and led the way upstairs to her own part of the house, which consisted of two rooms on the second floor. Nothing escaped Cartyn's eye, yet nothing disgusted him. He was in the absurd mood to suppose that he was playing a game, and finding a new country; and everything helped the impression—even the novelty of stairmats made of clothtags, such as one sees in cottages, and a pot of musk in the staircase window, and the

dreary brown "marbled" walls of that staircase, and the exhilarating view of grey roofs and red chimneys and other people's backyards with clothes hanging out to dry.

Mary had hurried up and had opened her sitting-room door to welcome her visitor, and as he entered he came to the conclusion that Mrs. Fresne must be a much younger woman than he had originally thought; she had, indeed, such a bright colour, and her eyes sparkled so.

He took the chair she offered and set to work at once, after a glance round at the room, to study the photographs with which it was mainly furnished. In this he showed tact. For of the poor common furniture what was not imitation mahogany was bamboo; and the scanty little crimson curtains in the two windows, and the tiny grate told a tale whose pathos would not bear comment or even, to him, thought at all. Their contrast to the woman was too vast to be even humorous. But the photographs were charming; many of them were of Indian friends and Indian days, and most of them were signed and beautifully framed. They covered the ugly walls whose common wallpaper was spotted like a fever, and scattered themselves all over the odd shelves and recesses in fine profusion. There were also some of the usual bazaar trophies, native curiosities and odd ornaments and weapons and little idols, and here and there some quaint ivories and things of distinct value, looking odd in the midst of the vulgar decorations of the place itself.

"If I offer you tea, Mr. Cartyn," said Mary a little shyly, "I must make it myself. I always do, you know. Shall I?"

"I shall be most grateful," he said, and picked up her photograph to hide a self-consciousness of his own at the thought that perhaps he was prying too cruelly into her little sad home secrets. However, it was too late to go back now; he had acted upon impulse in coming here, and now he must stay it out. And she seemed quite at ease. She placed a kettle on the little fire and went into the next room and removed her hat. Then he heard her busy with cups and saucers at an outer cupboard, and she came in and laid a little embroidered teacloth, very much faded by constant washings, quite naturally, talking to him as she did so about the photographs which he was examining, as any hostess not compelled to get the tea herself might do.

"Here you are on a hill-pony," he said, "in a big rush-hat—

strong sunshine and shadow. By Jove! That must have been a glorious day. And here you are in a palanquin; and here you are rowing; and here's a group—that's you under the tree, though there's something different about you, isn't there?"

"Yes, added years," said Mary demurely, busy over the tea-caddy, only she was laughing to herself, not apparently at all depressed.

"No, it isn't that," said Cartyn, still examining it. "I tell you what," he suddenly glanced up at her, "it's your hair. Don't you do it differently now?"

He studied her head bent over the caddy, and then remembered that he had never yet seen her without her hat. It was a charming head, fine of proportion and covered with crisp, warm brown hair which in the picture was pulled straight back from the brow, and in real life was parted in the middle and brought up to a high knot in steady ripples. It was a very pretty head, held delicately, like a flower on a tall stalk.

"Well, of course," said Mary, "I'm years older, for one thing. That portrait represents a ridiculously happy schoolgirl. Those were just merry days!—that was before my marriage."

She had not meant to allude to her own affairs, but the words slipped out before she was aware, and in spite of herself she could not help her voice sinking lower over the last two words, in a sort of pained hush. It was instinctive, and she was hardly conscious of it herself.

Cartyn heard the tone. He kept the thing in his hand, saying as naturally as he could, after a decent pause—

"You were very young when you married, then?"

"Yes." She had not a word of self-pity to offer him, though here was a fine opportunity for a woman of melodrama. He tried her again out of curiosity.

"And have you left—I suppose you have—many friends in India?"

She smiled sadly to herself as she went about her tea-duties, and shook her head.

"Why, whose friends are left anywhere," she said, "in these days? Friends fly about all over the place; and no one thinks of staying in India for years together as they used to do in the days of interminable travelling."

He could not test her further, because his heart was full of

admiration of her reticence, in that here was a chance and a mood for self-pity on a grand scale, and she would not take an inch of it. She had no means of knowing that he was aware of her story, and she did not now play upon his recently offered friendship by a dramatic recital of it. Over her teacups, at her homely occupation, she seemed a being most dignified and fair with this refinement added to her graces. A being, even, of another age; the stately Beatrice of Dante carrying "love within her eyes"; or the woman of the old proverbs "opening her mouth with wisdom." He was afraid his own eyes showed more than they ought, and cast about for an occupation.

"You're busy," he said, jumping up. "I must do something too. Where are your flowers? Shall I arrange them while you cut that bread and butter? I've never done it that I know of, but I must be industrious too."

She got the bouquet, and gave him some little vases and Benares bowls, and proceeded to laugh helplessly as she watched his wild blunders over these floral decorations. There were three bunches of violets, and two of yellow and white jonquils, the heavily scented species. With great and laborious care he cut the tow binding the violets, and after spreading them out picked them up one by one and placed them in the tallest vase with the result that their tiny heads were almost instantly immersed and lost in the water, like drowned insects.

"Somehow I can't make them show," he said, staring at her. "What is it? Let's try these."

So he unfastened the jonquils with equal care and proceeded to stick their long lanky stalks in the squat Benares bowls.

"This ought to show," he said triumphantly.

"It does," said Mary. "It looks like a rheumatic spider! Oh, look! they're all coming out again!"

For, with a movement of the table shaking the water, all the long-legged jonquils gave a heave and flopped out of their shallow bowl on to the tablecloth again.

He gave up in despair.

"Look here, I'll cut the bread and butter," he said, with inspiration, "if you'll do this floral business."

She looked dubious.

"But really," he argued, "I have done bread and butter before.

You don't go to Sunday-school treats without learning something. Do let me finish, and you finish this?"

So they changed tasks, and in a few minutes the bread and butter was cut, and the flowers lightly and gracefully arranged, and they sat down to as pleasant a little tea as any two persons ever enjoyed.

Cartyn had always hated that part of his duty which forced him into tea sanctuaries, but for once he did not chafe at its necessity, as he had done at many a more elaborate and dainty set-out.

They talked about India, quite superficially, and about Lenten services, and about work—anything that came along. She told him all about the Hoydens, and described Mrs. Gigshaw and detailed the covert reasons for the rival parties in that assembly. She made him laugh once or twice by the whimsical sketches she drew of her employers and their friends, and he rose to leave with the sense that there was still a great deal to say if he could only have stayed longer. As he bade her good bye he said—

"Aren't you rather lonely here? Wouldn't you like me to send some really nice woman to call? You ought to have friends here, as well as in India."

Her merry face fell to that old look of sadness.

"You are very kind, but I cannot receive any one, however nice," she said, averting her eyes. "I cannot say anything more definite, but it is not only poverty that keeps me here, living in this obscure fashion. There is—another reason. I would ask you," she paused and struggled with herself, "to believe nothing of wrong in that reason. I assure you there is nothing—in the past—of which I need before Heaven feel ashamed. That is all I can say. Please do not ask any further. You are a man, and a clergyman, and less likely to measure these things by their outward appearances. But these ladies—these nice, kind, really benevolent ladies—have another foot-rule by which they test such mysteries. I fear I should come out badly from such an ordeal—I fear I might get more foot than rule in the end!" She laughed rather sadly.

"But the Hoydens——" began Cartyn.

"Oh, the Hoydens are different. I am their servant, after all, though treated fairly enough. There is no question of whether I should be fit, being a mystery, to associate with their young daughters, or to teach the poor!"

"Now you are bitter!" he said. "And you mean Mrs. Holden." He alluded to a lady who was a light in the parish, and who had not greatly welcomed this new addition to it. She shook her head but smiled guiltily all the same.

"You do," he continued. "But I had no thought of sending her. Her goodness is the direct kind that goes in a strict groove. Poor, dear woman, she cannot get to heaven except on railway lines—but why be angry with her?"

"I'm not. Only I don't want to get under the wheels," said she.

"No, no, naturally. However, we will talk about this later. Meanwhile, count me as a friend, at any rate."

She could not speak to thank him. She smiled and tossed up her chin a little with raised eyebrows, a whimsical trick of hers. He went away puzzled and a trifle irritated with somebody or something. He felt angry with the poor street, in which the sharp glittering spring sunshine was beginning to fade, with a stern sense of anger in his heart. He passed out into the broader thoroughfares and away to the regions of large, looming, grey houses and grim squares where his church was situated, feeling almost strange in returning to a world where he was a solemn and responsible being, and not a boy cutting bread and butter in a flower-scented parlour.

CHAPTER III

"YES, brother, we have been more blessed than we could have hoped in our Lenten mission. A brother lent us a magic-lantern and the outside of the church wall was illuminated by a large invitation made of coloured oil lamps, so that even the people on Vanguards could see and understand."

"Ah," said the vicar. He was in a hurry, making his way to Darnley Gardens. His clerical friend went on—

"The fervour was immense. Miss Zoe Yearsley and Miss Ursula Limpole, two of our most faithful sisters, attended every single service, and there were in all forty-nine of these. It is wonderful!"

"Did you get any men, though?" said the vicar.

"Men? Yes, indeed. A notoriously evil-living election agent—and a converted barrister. And we managed to circumvent the bishop over the matter of incense. And everyone of those little violet books have gone."

"Gone."

"Oh, I mean people have bought them. And you will be glad to hear that we are to have a Quiet Day in the Rural Deanery. I have urged it for months. I have worked and toiled for that until I am almost spent. Every day I have hammered and fought for it."

"All those fussing days for one quiet one, eh?"

"Yes, yes, but think how necessary. I am urging the Rural Dean to get Fraser to hold it."

"Fraser?—the man who puts O. S. B. after his name?"

"Yes. You seem dubious?"

"I am only dubious as to the quietness of the day!" said Cartyn. "Fraser is not admitted by many of the men in the Deanery at all. They will have something to say, it strikes me!"

"Ah, even so. But so long as he rouses the dormant, surely all will be well?"

"Yes, but I don't call that quiet."

The vicar was hurrying to Mrs. Courtman's at the moment. On his way there he had found himself overtaken by this friend, one Brother Anselm, a man who had the volcanic reputation of being at once a socialist reformer and a ritualist of the severest school. That is to say, his propaganda was the overturning of all order in worldly things, and the supreme worship of authority (his own) in matters spiritual. He would have you rob a capitalist, but die to obey the merest hint, covered in dog-Latin, of a dead and foreign bishop, as interpreted by himself. He was in the sincerest earnest, and he had blue finger-nails and no sense of humour. He liked Mr. Cartyn. He saw in him a latent love of formalism, possibly capable of eventually turning him into the ecclesiastical gramophone he himself had become.

But the vicar seemed pre-occupied. "You are in a hurry?" the brother asked.

"Oh, I'm going to see some one who wants my advice. Rather a queer case. A sort of affair of a confession."

"Confession? I didn't know you allowed that. Was it in a box or merely in the vestry?"

Cartyn stared at the odd question. "Why, in the vestry," he said. "We have no boxes."

"Then it need hardly be discussed. It was only a conversation, apparently."

"Oh no, it was more than a conversation—far more," said Cartyn, puzzled to express his meaning.

"My brother, it could not have been. If the penitent sat on a chair and merely talked it over it does not come under the heading of genuine confession."

"But—does the chair make the difference?" gasped Cartyn.

"Oh no, the spirit."

"Then the spirit was most emphatically confession."

"Even so, my brother. Yet if all things were not in order this could not be so."

"Then," said Cartyn, "you give me to understand that because she sat at a vestry table she need not make reparation for her sin?"

"You are perverse, brother," said the recluse, with a great and milky mildness, capable of extreme irritation upon certain occasions, and this was undoubtedly one. "If the erring woman only

came and talked she could only receive conversational advice in reply."

"And her repentance need only be conversational—chatty?" said Cartyn, sardonic in his disappointment.

The brother waved a bluish hand in deprecation.

"You fail to see my point, my brother. Make the poor soul obey the Church and leave the rest."

"But how could I?" he said. "A society woman—idle, selfish, emotional, unrestrained, capricious. I've always worked amongst men. These wild creatures are not to be understood by the ordinary masculine mind. Women in the slums are simpler beings altogether, with natures on a larger, plainer, more definite scale altogether. One can do something with them—but these frivolous, talkative, fly-away women are not to be dealt with at all. I defy any ordinary man to make anything of them beyond bringing them to church occasionally, and doing what little good he can. They think a gift of money covers everything—every responsibility, every insincerity, every lie, every wretched worldly crime of which they are capable! They have no hearts."

"No, friend, but obedience, strict, implicit obedience to every little rule and form of Mother Church, is a churchman's first duty. He must submit, even to the bowing of the neck."

As he spoke they passed a short spare little man of the artizan class, who nodded, possibly good-humouredly, but certainly rudely, to Brother Anselm, without removing his hat. He has a wispy beard and a fiery, panther's eyes.

"There goes a grand fellow," said Brother Anselm; "one of our coming labour leaders. That man has worked himself to a skeleton to overthrow the tyrannies that oppress the world. He will succeed, if determination counts at all."

"What tyrannies?" asked the vicar.

"All the tyrannies. The laws of England, the laws of capital, the heel of the social oppressor. He will strive to overturn the power of class, even if it mean revolution, civil war. He will stop at nothing, nothing!"

He waved his hand and his wide serge sleeve with wild enthusiasm. He could not see his own self-contradiction. His face was actually flushed with his zeal to push forward the cause of a social anarchy and a moral autocracy at the same moment. He did not realize that in doing so he epitomised the longings of

many modern reformers. The dream is an old one, ever new. "Thou shalt disobey the laws. Thou shalt obey me."

Cartyn, who respected his character, which was blameless, and who only threw doubts on his intelligence, held out a friendly hand as they came in sight of Darnley Gardens.

"I'm due here. I must say good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye. And, if I may offer my advice, I say urge the penitent to submit to the Church and all will be well."

"But if she won't, what then?"

"Put her, then, out of your mind. The world will claim its own. Shake the dust off your feet."

The vicar went up to No. 16 steps really almost wishing he could. He disliked his errand for all it was of his own appointing.

The hour Mrs. Courtman had chosen was late afternoon, and he was shown into the foolishly furnished house, positively untidy with unnecessary luxury, feeling self-conscious and most unlike an accusing pastor. He reflected as he followed the footman up the stair that it is much easier to accuse comfortably when the windows are church-window shaped, and there are no gardenias in bowls, and dead pink satin tapestry walls, and when there isn't a tea-kettle singing cheerily on a ridiculous little silver stove, and a smell of toast and muffins. These things are too full of home suggestion for the ascetic mood.

Mrs. Courtman, handsome, eager, heavily ornamented and very trailing as to costume, received him with a cordiality perfectly respectful and unmistakably genuine.

She offered him tea and would not have the lights put on, the rosy firelight illuminated the great room, and made its dainty treasures seem to dance and kindle in fairy fashion all round the little island of comfort, made by the tea paraphernalia in the midst of its vastness.

Cartyn kept his inner mind strictly on his errand, and though he had to talk conventionally about his church, his parish, his work, his ideas, for the first half-hour, he was determined that he would not go away before something had been said to bring her to their original business. Even he could see that she talked too fast to be happy.

"I suppose you lead a busy life?" he said, to check her chatter, after a time. "You go out a great deal?"

"Oh dear, yes—frightfully," she said. "My life is one whirl, I do assure you. You know what society is, and what it demands' I tell you I never have a minute to call my own—my real own."

"Then may I commend you for finding time for church this Lent?" he said.

"Oh well, as to that, I've tried such lots of things," she said. "One is uncomfortable and unhappy in the corners, you know—it is so horrid to be tremendously successful but unhappy in the corners—have you ever felt it? Oh no, but you wouldn't; you are a clergyman, and they're different. As I told you if I could only be really good, I fancy I might be happier. Only I can't alter my hats to boat-shaped ones, or grow ugly—is that really necessary? I went to the Christian Science people one year, only they seemed to think that because I hadn't got cancer I wasn't worth bothering about. And they told me that all me—the real *me*, the temper one, with the frivolities and the loves and muddles and hates—didn't really exist, you know, but was a delusion; and that the only real part of me was a dull, flat soul, that I'm sure *I* haven't been introduced to. It must be in the attic. So I left them—it was really strong of me to do so, for an ultra-smart set attended on fine Sundays—and went—you mustn't be shocked—to the spiritualists. They said nothing about sins at all. They simply wrote things on slates, such dull things, not always quite proper, and the ghosts had such ribald names. I can't imagine a respectable dead person called Jimkins or Bloggins, can you? Yet that was what the visions called themselves. They didn't seem to me to be quite nice. Rather common, they were. So I tried Farm Street when you can't get in because it's so crowded, and that did for a time because I never got in, yet I had the real satisfaction of driving there and coming away again, and who could do more? However, I found that empty, especially in bad weather, so I gave up all religion of a serious kind, and took to philosophy and bridge and Savoy suppers. But one tires of them all. So I came to your church, and I really liked it, because the music is so sweet, and when you preached you were not narrow, and talked about real life and said kind things. Really it was you that I came for. You looked as if you wouldn't be always shocked."

He listened patiently. Her flighty words needed the accompaniment of her really troubled eyes and spoilt anxious face.

old before its time, to rob them of hopeless flippancy. He had at least the sense to see that her mode of expression and his might be widely different, and yet that the essence of her longing might be the same.

"I'm glad you think I said kind things," he said slowly. "Because I've been thinking that perhaps I may have seemed harsh when you spoke to me the other day. If I did so, I hope you'll forgive me? I had no such intention. Was it so?"

"Harsh? Oh no; only you asked for so much," she said. "I'm glad you have spoken of it now. I've thought over what you said, but I *can't* do that. Think what it would mean. How do you reinstate a character? I suppose in this case it would be to the trustees and the lawyers and so on. I know the trustees—there is Colonel Graydon and one other; they are old friends, in with all my set out there, and connected with everybody I am intimate with over here. How can I go and say to them, 'Look here, I've done a frightful thing—half-invented and deliberately fostered a fearful scandal against an innocent woman, causing her to be harshly judged by her husband, and left a widow, penniless and in disgrace!' No, I couldn't. Can't you see that they would all cut me, cast me off, send me to Coventry if it came out as it would have to come out to restore her her fortune. Besides," she added, in a more assured voice, "probably I could not find her if I tried. I've been to that church four times since and looked all over for her, but she was not there. I'm beginning to fancy that she was only a passing visitor—this is a crowded part of London, and people easily appear and disappear again. Oh, you must see that I couldn't go through such a public scene as that! Why, it would be ruin to me!"

"She is ruined," he said quietly.

"Oh dear, yes, but *she* must be used to it now."

"I don't think she is—can be. Besides, that would not release you from your own responsibility. The action remains unwiped out, whatever she does. You must see that."

"But think of the horrible scenes I should have to go through! Oh no, it is not human to expect me to do that. I should never hold up my head again."

"Sin always brings stern consequences," said Cartyn. "Of course, I see your point of view—it would be a terrible ordeal for you. Yet it is your plain duty. And until you do restore

her to her rights, believe me you will never have any real peace of mind," he paused a moment—"you are too good a woman to be happy with such a lie in your soul," he said solemnly.

"Good? I---a good woman?"

"Yes, or you would not have confessed. You would not have been touched by---this."

He took the drab cotton glove out of his pocket suddenly, and held it out in the firelight.

"What," she cried, "what is that? What---why, it's an old glove just such as I described to you! It is hers, I believe. How have you got hold of it?" She suddenly flashed on an electric light that stood by his elbow and looked in his face, perhaps thinking to find guilt there. But he was looking back at her calmly and steadily.

"It is only a guess," he said. "A lady came to me the other night and asked me to sign some papers, a matter of a reference to enable her to earn her living. I had to read over some of her private papers, and in doing so I found her to be the widow of an Indian judge at Bahore named Fresne, who had died on board the homeward bound liner *Eclat* five years ago. She has an annuity of fifty pounds a year, and has for some secret reason to live in seclusion and away from friends. She dropped this glove in leaving my house. I could not help connecting her story and yours, though she herself told me nothing. You need not say yes or no to this guess of mine. I have no right to ask and you no obligation to reply."

Mrs. Courtman had taken the glove in her hand and was looking at it steadily, her face suffused by a flush of shame, but her mouth sulky and angry and her brow knitted.

"Then," she said, after a pause, "I suppose she is living here, in this neighbourhood?"

"Hardly this neighbourhood," said Cartyn, "though in this parish. She has lodgings in a slum, not so very far from here."

"In a slum---oh no!"

"But yes, most certainly. She has to be near her work, and there are no rooms to be got for the prices she can give except in a poor back street that you, at any rate, would call a slum. Perhaps I don't, as I have worked in the East End. But they are dreary houses let out in one and two rooms at a time, and there are"—he paused for a dramatic illustration such as he

thought she would understand—"there are dirty children on the doorstep and cornets on the kerb."

"Oh, it's too awful,!" said Mrs. Courtman. She got up and threw the glove across to the table at his side, and paced rapidly about the room in angry excitement, uttering occasional ejaculations. "How long have you known her?" she continued.

"About two months," he replied. "But only very slightly. She did something for a wretched girl in my district, and I got to know her through one of our deaconesses. I never really spoke to her about her own affairs till the other night, though I could see from the first that she was a lady of birth and education, and I confess I was rather curious, and a little horrified at her wretched mode of living. There seemed to be something radically wrong. I spoke to a lady who works in the parish about her, but she said, 'Oh, there is some black story against her, you may be sure. No nice woman with proper friends would be living in such a street in such poverty and with her looks, too!' That lady, whom I have hitherto regarded as motherly—she is, in fact, a very good mother and happy and rich—warned me solemnly against permitting this mysterious Mrs. Fresne to do good to my poorer people, or be seen about our parochial affairs. She was so sure there was a 'black story' against her."

He rose and walked to the fireplace and stood there, suddenly thrusting his hands deep into his pockets and looking down at the floor; then he said slowly and deliberately, "I now know that she was right. There is."

"Yes, there is," said Mrs. Courtman in passionate reply; "but I dare you to tell a soul about my share in it! Miserable as I am," she cried out wildly, her voice rising to an hysterical note, "I will not do what you say! I cannot. I dare not. If that is all the comfort your Church and you can give me, then all I can say is you are as useless as the Christian scientists and the spiritualists. I thought that by confessing my fault I could get peace of mind, but here you have landed me in far more trouble and despair than I ever felt before. It's making me quite ill. If I cannot get 'the Church's forgiveness' by saying I'm sorry, then I'll do without it altogether!"

Cartyn remained standing with his hands in his pockets, his eyes averted. He let her rave on, and then said quietly, "There is positively no question of my speaking to a soul about it with-

out your leave. I cannot do so—my hands are tied—even if I wanted to. That would be a betrayal of a confidence made in confession. Of course, you can trust me. But you came to me to point the way of happiness for you, and I have pointed it, so far as I am able. I will go now. But let us both pray for a way out of this sad tangle.”

She took his hand with something of the air of a cross child that has only half got over its sulks, and her eyes were wet and miserable.

“Then good-bye. I will write,” she was saying. Just then the door opened, and a visitor was announced. Cartyn saw a rather absurdly “overgroomed” man come walking mincingly into the long drawing-room, a man no longer young, with a foolish but handsome face, with heavy eyelids and a much twisted moustache. He made his exit at once, but he had the misfortune of possessing very sharp ears, and he heard as he shut the door behind him, “Oh, Colonel Graydon——”

“My dear Florence—a parson?” And Mrs. Courtman’s fretful reply—

“Yes, yes. You know it’s the thing to be serious this Lent. But I don’t think I shall last out till Easter—it’s already spoiling my temper, and I’m sick of it!”

He did feel, then, very like shaking the dust of Darnley Gardens off his feet. Apostolic efforts, he had always believed, were at least met by picturesque resistance.

Impatiently he now said to himself he saw no comparison between an early Christian martyr meeting large yellow lions in a Roman arena, and a modern product of Oxford facing this shifting woman in her own drawing-room! The lions—they always had been very large and yellow in the mission-room oleographs—made you look tremendously dramatic: which would have been a consolation. Mrs. Courtman didn’t. Though quite stupid herself, she made you feel small. After all, why shouldn’t he do as Brother Anselm did, and be content to spend his energies on Miss Ursula Limpoles and little violet books? It was much less humiliating and, in ordinary people’s eyes, it was much more religious. What was wrong with him?

Walking along quickly in angry meditation, he came in sight of his church: its tall, tapering form outlined sharply against the declining primrose colour of the evening sky, the lightly

built, delicate pinnacles like lace against their pure transparent background. Above the smoke and the shadow of lesser buildings it stood, tall and beautiful, dwarfing by comparison the great gloomy streets that stretched for miles around it, and so high as to be indifferent to the heavy pall of vapour that even in the clear evening settled above their chimneys.

Somehow the very building seemed to possess a dignity, a sense of peace that was far from him or his. What tradition was it that could be eloquently expressed by an exquisite building, and yet not found in the soul of the man who ministered in it? That thing against the sky was stone and bricks and mortar. He was an immortal soul, a pastor of men. Yet it had what he had not.

He felt disturbed, chaotic, angry—more angry than the spring's wicked south-east wind, cutting up the heads of the newly born lilac buds in the squares, could quite account for.

Something in his training, something in his experience, had played him false, he said.

He spent an hour over some charity business that required an expenditure of practical common sense. That was to cheer himself up. He said he still had that.

Then he went home to his ugly vicarage. In the rather drearily lighted hall there was a large parcel awaiting him. He slit open and read all his letters first, then turned to this and opened its many careful wrappings. It contained an exquisitely carved oak triptych, the three sacred figures most beautifully wrought of ivory, wood, and metal, the faces and garments coloured in perfect imitation of life. It was possibly Italian, and was certainly almost flamboyant in its fanciful beauty; and it must have cost a heavy sum of money, so perfect of its kind was every tiny portion of the material and workmanship. With it was a note on mauve paper:

"DEAR MR. CARTYN,—Won't you accept the enclosed from one in penitence and misery? I am convinced that I shall never know luck or happiness again till I gain forgiveness. Oh, do not be too hard on one so unhappy and despairing. Let me see you again some time soon, and let me be forgiven.—Yours in sadness,

"FLORENCE COURTMAN."

He turned from the superstitious offering in momentary disgust.

"Am *I* the judge?" he said angrily.

Then he told his man to put the thing in the study. After supper he had some letters to write and the preparations for a sermon to glance over, tasks that meant two hours' close work at least. The triptych stood before his eyes whenever he glanced up—his man had placed it with pride on a side-table in full view of his writing-table. Again and again he glanced at the exquisite picture, the ivory figure of the Christ and Mary and John—the vision of infinite suffering so tenderly prolonged—almost against his will.

"A woman can buy that," he said, "look upon it, and in a sense appreciate it, and yet exist for five whole years with the secret of another's ruin upon her soul! What is there wrong with our religion? What is the root of the sentimentality and superstition that makes such a thing possible? Eternal wisdom," he put his hand over shut eyes for a moment, "make me see."

He could not know how his prayer was to be answered.

CHAPTER IV

"DEAR! Dear! Dear! But this is too dreadful! Unbearable! Whew! The heat!"

Lady Jiberene, short and stout and ruddy, went fussing round and round the club drawing-room like a tin duck set going by clockwork. She had that appearance of having been wound up and set going without her own volition, as little women who take short steps so often have when excited. Round and round she span, waving her short arms.

"You ought to attend to the temperature, Mrs. Fresne! The heat of these rooms is appalling. The register is 80°, I declare! Most unwholesome. Please let my orders be attended to. Where is the footman?"

She whirled round as she spoke, and as though the clockwork had taken a freakish turn in slowing down, suddenly trundled out of a side door and disappeared in search of fresh (or fresher) worlds to conquer.

There were three doors to the club drawing-room, which formed a sort of centre to the building. The opposite one now flung open. "Good heavens! Mrs. Fresne, what *are* you doing? Opening the windows?" rang out a deep and resonant voice in huge displeasure.

"Only for a second, Miss Jacques. Do you really mind? I was told it was too hot a moment ago."

"Too hot? It is never too hot. I'm sure I can never get warm in this ice-house!" said the gaunt intruder. "However, if you must let in the air for a moment, I'll go into the reading-room and wait. But please send for me when it has got nice and warm again."

"Thank you," said Mary, busy with the window, while an open-mouthed footboy, called the footman, tugged at another.

"Oh, for the good of the club——" began Miss Jacques magnanimously.

"It was only Lady Jiberene," began Mary.

"Jib—Lady Jiberene?" cried Miss Jacques, returning precipitately into the room. "Then put down that window, if you please, at *once*! Boy, shut that window! I will not be blown away like an air-balloon for that, that——" The sentence went off into grumbles, undeterminate, ferocious. It was perhaps as well, for the footboy's ears as well as his mouth were open.

"Mrs. Fresne, why *do* you not kindly see that all the rooms are heated just as the members like?" said a plaintive-voiced Hoyden, now popping a weary head round the third door, and looking at Mary with peevish self-pity. "Everybody in the reading-room is grumbling dreadfully. I wish you would. It gets on my nerves to hear grumbling. I do hate grumblers. I'm sure everything is very annoying!"

"It is almost impossible to please all the members," pleaded Mary.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, do not tell me any grievances! I'm sure you try, yes, but my nerves will not let me listen to any complaints. I simply cannot endure it."

Mary straightened her neat little cuffs with a gesture of despair, and went away to wash her hands, soiled by the window-sills. She kept a calm face, but her chin would just jerk up a bit. It did that sometimes when she was not aware that it was going to. On these occasions she found a sort of patient taciturnity her only refuge. She had been at the club some weeks now, and had begun to learn something of the tactics required of a paid lady who is under the direction of a multitude of her own sex. Luckily for herself she could hold her tongue. In this manner she had braved the infinite terrors of a divided feminine committee and come out scathless. It is true that some of the ladies said she had "no spirit," but one can survive that, buoyed up by a knowledge of having kept good-humoured through the carnage of four Wednesday morning committee meetings, devoted to trifling tastes of business sauced by strong personalities.

To-day the whole place was in uproar, for, as usual at this time of the year, the hospitable Hoydens were giving a large entertainment, the main idea of which was for the members and their friends to meet social celebrities. The meeting of these lions consisted mainly in hearing them gobble answers to questions between mouthfuls of snatched food over several other

persons backs and shoulders—that is to the majority. Of course, a chosen few must have got near enough to the celebrities to ask them the questions, since somebody in the crush certainly did interrogate them with strings of queries appropriate to their respective “shops”; but at the Hoydens, any being less in rank than the immediate cliques of Lady Jiberene and Miss Jacques, stood a poor chance of seeing much over the fence, unless very tall and very pushing, and entirely unscrupulous, selfish, and ill-mannered. This being a heavy price to pay for talking to an Australian footballer, or a Malay actress, many of the nicer Hoydens withdrew from the contest and talked to the limp and chipped men, the only ones of their sex to be got on these occasions, or ate buns and sweets, or retired in ominous silence instead. If the silence was afterwards productive, that is beside the point.

At these reunions the costumes ranged wildly over every possible stage of æstheticism, also over every possible phase of utility, an even larger era. Far the quaintest, however, were those Puritanic in tone, but conscious of having made a concession to the world of fashion, which combination produced Trianon hats tilted at an angle more than rakish over hair not coiffed at all, but pulled back tightly anyhow into a walnut-like knob behind. This style enforced a draughty gap between hat and head terrible to behold, but quite unmoving to a Hoyden, a being nothing if not philosophic over trifles.

To-day Mrs. Gigshaw, the ever alert, was distinguished by something coy in faded pink, with a bird's wing and an animal's tail, and a rodent's head, and a tree's fruit in it, the extreme abandon of which suggested a stall at a provision store on Christmas Eve. It seemed only to need little Union Jacks stuck in here and there to complete the effect. But Mrs. Gigshaw was unconscious and quite happy, having a large field for her labours in the fact that Lady Jiberene and Miss Jacques both happened to be wild to get “in” with one particular celebrity, a situation fraught with dramatic possibility to one so determined on mischief as that lady in gala mood.

From the beginning of the afternoon she had studiously worked at “setting” the one rival against the other in this connection, and now that the more formal part of the entertainment was over, the speeches concluded and the talk started, sh-

began to find things humming in a manner after her own heart; for already Lady Jiberene had publicly snapped at Miss Jacques over the possession of a brilliant Canadian man singer, and Miss Jacques, clutching at a wandering admiral, with a health craze and hair coming off in patches, who had been got there because his medical man had told him to cultivate intellectual interests, had retired with him to a higher aristocratic elevation, and began to talk to him patronisingly about "these poor dear *clever* nobodies." But the patched admiral was disappointed, since the cleverness was all he had come for, and here he said, was a snob keeping him from enjoying it after all! He might just as well have been at his own club, where he could find the well-born and dull in larger quantities, and certainly in far more attractive form than this. For Miss Jacques was, to his unerring and unsparing masculine eye, nothing more than a gaunt old maid of fifty, uncommonly tall, so tall, indeed, that her long horse-profile and intensely solemn black eyes, showed above any average crowd, while the finery on her rather hearse-like toque never appeared to be quite clean. She had much prestige at the club on account of being "well-born"; everybody said, "Oh, but you see Miss Jacques is so *well-born*," as an excuse for anything either attractive or tiresome in her actions, and a floating myth that she was cousin to a late Lord of Appeal, and niece or aunt to a peer, and godmother of an Honourable baby, protected her from many a stricture on her distinctly dingy fineries and loud dictatorial manners.

But she had been so long accustomed to the feminine homage of the club, that she was perfectly contented with herself and her pretensions, and failed to see the unhappy admiral wriggling with impatience.

"I come here," she said, "because—oh, well, why *does* one belong to things out of one's own circle? Really, because one likes to study the people and their funny ways. I always was a great student of human nature; nothing escapes me—nothing—not the smallest thing. Oh, no!"

The admiral was not large, especially by comparison with the Amazon herself; but he decided to escape, nevertheless.

"I came," he croaked angrily, "because *I* like to get away from the funny ways of 'one's own circle,' as you call it. I came because I do like to see a pretty woman sometimes, though

I am getting old, and we have none in our crew. There are about three in this crowd. There's that singer from America, and that good-natured Mrs. D'Arblay, and——"

"Mrs. D'Arblay? Oh no—really. But they are quite new people. Why, one never heard of them yesterday!"

"You can," said the admiral, taking a meat lozenge slowly, "be heard of so much yesterday that you belong to it and ought to be struck off the calendar. The only other charming person here is a lady I am told is the secretary—perfectly charming, lovely, grace and breeding itself. I only saw her for a moment but I wish she would come back."

This was too much even for Miss Jacques, who stalked angrily away and confided to her friend Miss Hyde, still in severely golfing costume, thought the drawing-room was full of chiffons, that poor dear old Admiral Saytor was getting into his second childhood.

"His first," said Miss Hyde laconically. "He never had another. I'm told he was the wickedest boy Eton ever turned out. He betted on the Derby before ever he cut his teeth, and cheated at bridge at three. It's time he was young for a change!"

Meanwhile Lady Jiberene was getting on famously with her celebrity, who was the unconscious bone of contention between the rivals, and Miss Jacques flew round the crowded room chattering hysterically to hide her confusion and indignation, followed by the irritating comments of Mrs. Gigshaw, who appeared to-day to have the capacity to swoop out of every corner and cranny and meet her prey, with the oblique eyes of a puss-cat and a smile **of** world-embracing benevolence. But even Mrs. Gigshaw only persecuted one of the rival parties at a time, and after pouncing out from behind a bank of ferns and hydrangeas to squeak a taunting remark to Miss Jacques for the fifth time, she came to the conclusion that Lady Jiberene had had enough triumph for one afternoon, and that it was high time her ministry was overthrown. So she shot her little slit eyes about for a weapon and suddenly beheld one, an excellent one, no other indeed, than the great Mrs. Courtman, approaching in regal manner through the crowd, having just arrived, the guest, indeed, of Miss Jacques. As a matter of fact, Miss Jacques had boasted a little of her coming, for to the Hoydens, Mrs. Courtman, with her wealth and beauty, represented a faction of gay

society that they liked to see and be on nodding terms with, although they, as intellectuals, professed to despise it. In the crowd Miss Jacques had not seen her friend arrive.

Now Lady Jiberene," said Mrs. Gigshaw confidentially, her wicked eyes dancing, "there is Mrs. Courtman, and no one to receive her! Do just please greet her, won't you? I see her looking about for Miss Jacques, who has apparently quite forgotten her duties. It is so awkward. You know her—do go to the rescue."

Lady Jiberene, ever hospitable, turned to the celebrity with a word of expressive apology, and forced her way up to Mrs. Courtman in the crush. Immediately she had done so Mrs. Gigshaw turned to Miss Jacques, whose melancholy heavy-lidded eyes were short-sighted, and who still had not seen her guest, saying—

"Miss Jacques, do take pity on" (she mentioned the celebrity), "Lady Jiberene has just deserted him in the most bare-faced manner for one of her smart idols. See, he is going into the tea-room alone. It shouldn't be allowed.

The words had immediate effect. Miss Jacques, who had been wild for this opportunity, stalked eagerly after the celebrity and constituted herself the ministering angel of his tea, and her rival was ousted. Then Mrs. Gigshaw sat down on a velvet covered sofa and fanned herself, chuckling with unholy satisfaction. When Lady Jiberene found she had lost her celebrity, and Miss Jacques her guest-of-honour, there would be a scene. And for it, Mrs. Gigshaw waited as patient people wait in queues for matinees.

But Florence, the newly arrived guest, was a little bored by the fussing crowd, which she called "common," and not in the best of humours, after a "rushing" day devoted to hard pleasure.

"If Miss Jacques is too busy to be found, never mind," she said. "I only ran in after two other affairs and a lunch party, as I have never seen the Hoydens and Miss Jacques would not take 'No.' But it really does not matter. One understands these oddities. So intellectual!"

"Oh, but we will find her," said delighted Lady Jiberene. "It is such a crowd, you know. And her eyesight is—failing." She put it that way rather unkindly, though poor Miss Jacques had always been short-sighted, from a girl. She fussed along in

front of the imposingly clad Mrs. Courtman, leading the way to the tea-room, meaning to find the lady in question. Over the heads of all, far in the distance, towered the unmistakable figure of her unconscious rival, and next to it—yes, in deep conversation—that of the celebrity! Lady Jiberene's heart stood still. Mrs. Courtman, languid and put out, did not even look into the large apartment, feeling piqued at having to hunt for a hostess in this fashion. The crowd was rough, and stared at her rich attire when it did not actually trample on it, and she was really eager to get away from a scene where she was not appreciated. "Come," she said to Lady Jiberene. "Do not let us go into that crush! I really can't. I will find a cool seat up there by those ferns on the stairs and rest a few minutes. No doubt she will come shortly. So kind of you to bother."

This was Lady Jiberene's moment of temptation. Should she point out Miss Jacques, or should she let her bear the punishment of her deeds?

She wavered a moment, then turned and went with Mrs. Courtman to the cool enclosure she had indicated, without saying a word about her rival's whereabouts.

"You are quite a God-send in this crowd!" said Mrs. Courtman. "So good of you to greet me! Really, I should have turned back in sheer terror if you hadn't."

"I am delighted," said her companion, with sincerity. She had long wanted to know Mrs. Courtman better, having only met her once in a purely formal way, and here was her opportunity to hand. They chattered on amicably, and she began to think the exchange from the celebrity was not a bad one. To her Mrs. Courtman represented an inner world of social things, that even her own money and capacity for entertaining and getting about had never quite reached; her parties in Sussex Place, Hyde Park, were many and various and crowded, and she went in hotly for protecting birds' wings, and for a little respectable socialism, and music patronage, but even then Mrs. Courtman whirled in circles she could only see soaring in a far sky. Being a modern Liberal she was naturally eager about these things.

She was popular enough in her own way, the wife of a city knight, rich and very full of energy; a woman of about forty-five, with a large, broad, kind face, rather highly coloured, and

suggestive in the main of geniality, except that when you really got into conversation with her you found that she had not the faintest sense of humour.

She gazed blankly, a little shocked, at any jokes not to be distinctly found in *Punch* and even to these she said, "Ha-ha," punctiliously every week, and then turned with relief to another journal and read the account of the wedding garments of a lady of aristocratic birth, of whom she had never heard, and of whom she would never know anything beyond these strangely personal facts.

Now as these two acquaintances chatted together in their alcove, Mary Fresne came out of one of the side rooms, on some business of the place, and passed down the stairs close to them. As she reached them she looked up and caught sight of Mrs. Courtman, who was speaking to her companion and did not observe her. Suddenly she too looked up, and gave a little cry of dismay.

"Oh—you!" she said, half under her breath.

Mary had gone white, and for a second had hesitated, arrested by a face out of the old days so suddenly before her in this unexpected place.

"Why, Flor——" she began involuntarily, and then perhaps remembered that it would be better for her to leave her old friend to make the first advance under the altered circumstances. The last five years had made her pitifully sensitive to changes.

Mrs. Courtman got up, her face as white as Mary's, and made as if to speak, but Mary had, with swift, bitter recollection of a possible reason for her silence, bowed quickly and passed on, and had disappeared into one of the office rooms downstairs before Florence could collect her wits.

"Do you know her?" said Lady Jiberene, with curiosity in every nerve.

"Yes, yes, we are acquainted," said Mrs. Courtman abstractedly; "we were once, that is, in India. But what is she doing here?" She looked quite disturbed.

"She is our new secretary. I myself recommended her, having known her for two years or more. She really needed the post, I believe."

"I see." Mrs. Courtman looked troubled and flushed.

"I hope there is nothing—nothing, you know——" began Lady

Jiberene with infinitely questioning eyes. She was one quivering note of interrogation.

"Why do you ask?" said Florence Courtman sharply, suddenly conscious of this.

"Oh, pray do not be offended. Only I thought you looked er—doubtful, and perhaps upset by meeting Mrs. Fresne. You must excuse me, really. You see I myself recommend her for the post rather on my own judgment, than on any real knowledge of her antecedents. She seemed a very nice, well-bred woman, but now, as a friend of *yours*——"

"Oh yes, yes. That is all right. But may I ask how you know her?"

"I met her in connection with some of my schemes for the poor and suffering. I try to do what I can, you know. One is very busy in these ways. She used to do some reporting and odd bits of literary work for Calvin Hopper in that paper of his, *The World's Trumpet*. She was sent to me fairly often to report things, and I was interested, as she seemed so pretty and poor, and not quite the type for such a rough sort of life. She does not look too strong, either."

"No," said Mrs. Courtman.

"I expect it was the hardship," continued Lady Jiberene unconsciously. "It would try a delicately nurtured person dreadfully, I should think, and I always thought her that. She seemed to have some tiny means of her own, but she was always glad of work. I supposed there was a mystery about her—she has never spoken of her affairs to any one that I know of—but Calvin Hopper found her diligent and careful, and so I risked putting her here. She has given satisfaction so far."

"Yes, yes. You seem to have been very kind," said Mrs. Courtman in a constrained voice. "Do you know, I think I will be going? This place is hot. If you see my friend Miss Jacques, will you kindly tell her I looked in? Thanks awfully and ever so for being so *sweet* as to entertain me. Yes, by motor is outside." They went down to the hall.

"Good-bye," said Lady Jiberene, her curiosity deeply disappointed after all. "Such a pleasure for *me*. But you make me quite uneasy—I don't quite know why—about Mrs. Fresne."

"No. Do I? Why?"

"Your manner when you met her—your reticence——"

"Oh, really," said Mrs. Courtman losing her readily lost temper; "how careful one has to be in a woman's club! I was merely astonished to see her, that was all. One's old acquaintances sometimes come upon one like ghosts—I hate ghosts." An idea shot through her quick mind, however; would these stupid, literal-minded women infer something to Mary's disadvantage by the mere fact of her own confusion? They were quite capable of it. A momentary struggle went on in her breast. Her rich fur coat was being put on to her by the club footman, and Lady Jiberene was still watching her face, eager for a crumb of information. She said to the servant sharply—

"I wish to speak to the club secretary."

He went to a door at the side of the hall, while Lady Jiberene poured forth a fussy flow of remonstrances and apologies, exasperating to hear. Mrs. Courtman hardly listened, but when Mary came out walked straight up to her, and taking her hand almost brusquely said—

"How do you do? Didn't you pass on the stairs just now? Isn't it ages since we met? I hear you are here as secretary. How clever of you! But you always were very clever, and all that—so superior to us all at Bahore. Do you remember? I hear you are doing splendidly here. How intellectual you must be?"

Then seeing a pained flush on Mary's brow, she shook her hand again, and nodding and smiling though her face was deadly white, she swept away, chattering to Lady Jiberene, and got into her electric car with much clatter and fuss.

Once inside it and away she tore at her right glove (pale lavender, in compliment to Lent) and wrenched it off, splitting it right across in her fury and flinging it out of the grougum window into the muddy street.

"To have to touch her hand!" she said. "To have to smile and patronise and be bountiful! I hate her for making me so miserable—I wish I'd never gone near the place! Am I always to come across her like this? Is she everywhere, and always the injured innocent? But I couldn't let those stupid block-headed women do her any more harm. I've sent her to the gutter, but I can't quite trample on her—even I! I haven't sunk so low as that. Oh, after this I'll go to a lawyer and get something settled on her privately—I'm sure it can be done. I shan't rest in my bed if I don't. And I do hate her eyes. They are

like a dead person's—what is it? I used to think they were pretty. They're hideous. She is. She's like a bad dream. My luck is so bad just now that something must, shall be done about this. I don't care what Mr. Cartyn says. I'm sure if I make her comfortable, settle a decent income on her so that she needn't work there it will be just the same. God isn't so particular as all that. But I must have peace and comfort. I wish I wasn't so unselfish by nature—most women wouldn't bother a bit about it. It was only such a little thing, after all. And can I help the consequences? Ugh! That is really the worst of clergymen—no wonder the Church of England is not so crammed as some of those nice new religions where they don't bother so about sins and things. I'm sure saying I am sorry to a clergyman in a vestry ought to be enough. It's quite trying enough, especially when he is nice-looking. I know some churches where they would think I was really good after that, and give me a blessing and say no more. What more, really, can you expect?"

She fussed home to dinner, dressing with extra care and even extravagance, but in silver and mauve in compliment to the Church's season, and went with a lively party to see a play of deeply allegorical and semi-religious significance put on the boards to suit such happy casuists. Later on they all had supper consisting mainly of fish and eggs, at a smart restaurant. The cheery little tables decorated with Parma violets, in similar delicacy of compliment. She chattered bridge to a bridge-maniac on her left, and carefully explained to him that in Lent she only played for penny points, as everybody admitted that there was nothing wrong in that, was there?

Then she went home alone, tired out and hot-eyed and faded "He ought to appreciate my efforts," she said; I'm only doing it to please him. He was my friend first, not hers. But if she dares to—— No, no. He is only interested in her in the uninteresting way clergymen often are. He thinks she's a widow in distress. I'm a widow too. He is my friend, not hers. But now I've made up my mind. I'll settle the matter myself."

CHAPTER V

THE vicar came into the room with an air of bustling resignation. It was the day following the Hoydens' party, and Lady Jiberene had called at the vicarage, her footman thundering on the severely ecclesiastical door as though he actually menaced the Church itself.

She was dreadfully plaintive.

"Oh, dear Mr. Cartyn," she said, "you must forgive me for coming when I am sure you are busy writing sermons, but I do just want to ask you one little question. It is about Mrs. Fresne. Do you—can you tell me—is there—er—well, I want to know if you know anything of her antecedents?"

He stood up before her, erect and resentful in the dreary masculine room, that in his house did duty for a drawing-room. That is to say, in it he interviewed persons of consequence that he disliked. On the grey-blue walls, still unchanged since the tenancy of a former vicar's wife, there were exceedingly chilly looking pictures, copies of very leggy Peruginos in black frames. They were the sort of pictures that made you feel good without doing anything to prove it. In fact, if you hung your house with them, you felt rather exonerated from ordinary human experience altogether, just as a person who has procured a bishop's sanction to abstain from fasting, feels rather better than a person who fasts.

A bookcase, full of the works of theology that Mr. Cartyn did not approve of, as being somewhat old-fashioned and severe, flanked by a row of chairs, as though arranged for a ghostly board-meeting, did duty for the entire furniture of one long, dreary wall. Against this rather cheerless background his dark brown, thin face and hair touched with grey looked forbidding. He cleared his throat, and motioned his fussy, much-ruffled, and feathery visitor to a black chair stuck in the middle of the room. Then he said—

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, don't think I doubt her or anything like that. But you gave her your reference, I recollect. I thought you might——" Even she paused at the rather straight glance of his eyes.

"Yes, certainly. But may I inquire why the question is brought up, Lady Jiberene?"

"Oh, it is really nothing! But you see she is counted as my friend—I mean at the Hoyden Club, you know. I recommended her. I took quite an interest in her from the first. I really did. One likes to help these poor ladies. One ought. But of course, I don't know very much of her, not really. And yesterday I was made a little uneasy by the manner of a lady, who it seems knew her years ago——"

"What lady?" he put in sharply.

"Mrs. Courtman. Do you know her?"

There was a moment's silence. "Yes, I know a Mrs. Courtman. But what has she said to you about this Mrs. Fresne?" said the vicar, calming his voice purposely.

"Oh, practically nothing. No. Only she came to the club and saw Mrs. Fresne there, and I must say I didn't quite like her manner. She looked—well—as though she had some information she *could* have given."

"I've often seen ladies look like that," said the vicar. He shook his head slightly. Lady Jiberene did not see the sarcasm.

"Well, yes, they do," she went on. "It is a very unpleasant thing, Mr. Cartyn, to feel that one has been too impulsive in giving one's—one's——" she was going to say patronage, but she did not quite like the way his left foot was tapping. And his eyes were on one of the Peruginos, not on her at all. No woman likes that, however free from coquetry. "One's——" she stutted angrily. He stopped fidgeting when she stopped for want of a word and put in—

"Kindness?"

Her full pink face went a little pinker.

"I wish to assist her," she said sharply. "But Mrs. Courtman, without meaning to, did look odd when they met."

"Did they meet?" he said quickly.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At our club—yesterday."

He nodded, his eyes fixed abstractedly on hers, thinking anxiously. She rose.

"Well, Mr. Cartyn, you seem unwilling to tell me anything," she said, a trifle huffily. When she became huffy she ruffled all her feathers and feather boas, like a fierce little hen.

He was recalled. "Oh, I am ready to repeat my entire and full responsibility with regard to that lady," he said with uneasy formality; "if that is what you require?" She passed the matter off, too annoyed with him to say more, and fussed away.

As a matter of fact, she had the previous afternoon returned from escorting Mrs. Courtman to her motor bubbling over with excitement and curiosity. That her little protégée, the secretary, should cause such a flutter in the calm hauteur of the great Mrs. Courtman, was a fact that Lady Jiberene viewed as full of significance. Either, she said to herself, her disinterested philanthropy had brought her a huge "find" in the social market, or else—her blue eyes darkened as she conceived the horrid thought!—she had nursed an adder in her bosom. Now a condition of affairs making it doubtful whether your friend is an asset or an adder makes matters very complicated. It is really difficult to preserve the exact balance that is required to treat both characters with decorum at one and the same time, keeping always an open door ready should the half suspected snake rear its head, and at the same time, keeping one's eternal devotion ready in one's pocket should the asset suddenly become a paying concern. Mary may have noticed a certain faintly hysterical character in the nature of Lady Jiberene's smiles and advances, on the days following the reception, and have puzzled her own direct and very simple brain as to what to make of them. They were at least spasmodic and full of odd jerks and contradictions, and she found that she must gradually learn to take no notice of such oddities, and to accept them as one of the natural results of accepting any one's patronage, however kindly meant.

As she went home, the night of the party, she gave way to worrying reflections, recalled by this living ghost of an old story. That was it—the old story. She leant her tired head back against the 'bus corner—she was sitting in the seat nearest the door—and let the jogging vehicle shake her, and the lights in the shops they rumbled past flash into her weary closed lids. After all, she said to herself, one can do no more than be honest; if an

evil world will say otherwise, let it. There was some inner part of her, she said to herself, that nothing could harm, let her take her pride in that, and against her these shafts would be hurled quite uselessly. It takes some grit to be a practical philosopher in the corner of a stuffy 'bus at ten o'clock at night, when one is very tired, and the world seems a large, rushing, cruel place of toil and oppression, but she managed it. She might even have said with Shakespeare at that moment—

“I am that I am: he that would level
At my abuses, reckons up his own.”

Yet even the pluckiest philosophy shudders and faints a little at the spectacle of an old friend turned acquaintance, patronising acquaintance, and she would not have been human if a little thrill of contempt had not shaken her, when she remembered Florence's tone.

But when she got back to the club next day, she found things at an exciting pitch. The air was simply electric with mystery. Every moment threatened a catastrophe. The two parties, now at last brought to open hostilities, were stalking about the place in a fever of expectation. Everybody was whispering in corners or at little tables, and the amount of lorgnettes used against quite innocent persons was terrific in itself, and the morally slain strewn the corridors. Even some of the costumes were warlike. Mrs. Gigshaw went about fairly chuckling with delight. It was a ministerial crisis of her own making. Everywhere one heard rumblings and rumors of war.

“Yes, and Lady Jiberene positively waylaid and caught Miss Jacques' guest, kept her to herself, and then packed her off with out even informing poor Miss Jacques that she had been!”

“Disgusting,” said Muriel Hyde; “but what can you expect. She was always bad form.”

“Well, really, whatever she was there is no excuse for behaviour like that! Even city knights who originally made soap don't expect their wives to play down *quite* so low,” said the first speaker.

Miss Hyde, the boyish and fresh-coloured, snorted with resonance.

“I can't think what you all were about to let such a pushing,

firesome woman get such a hold here," she said. "The way she rushed in that secretary of hers was abominable, and quite outside decent rules. I do like fair play."

"Yes, well that was not nice, no, not quite in our usual form," admitted the other, a lady for the moment unattached distinctly to either camp, but inclining towards that generalised by Miss Jacques, on account of having as yet received no card of invitation to Lady Jiberene's numerous receptions, though she had fished determinedly in weather fair and foul.

"That horrible woman, Mrs. Gigshaw, is going about saying she is astonished at the whole thing," said Miss Hyde. "I don't suppose she is. She probably had a hand in setting one against the other. Still the fact remains that Lady Jiberene was guilty of a most unsportsmanlike action. I vote we let her see that the club objects."

"She must see already," giggled the other. "There has been quite a coolness ever since that evening. I believe Miss Jacques gave that secretary of hers a good jacketing over some other matter, just by way of protest. Really, I don't blame her."

"Hard on the secretary—but she shouldn't be pushed by such people," said the laconic Miss Hyde. "Put not your trust in the city! I'm happy to say *we* are 'county,' and keep clear of mob outsiders."

Miss Jacques was just at the moment enjoying a rush of unlooked-for popularity, a turn in the tide of Hoyden opinion consequent on her unfair treatment by Lady Jiberene, or what was everywhere reported as such; and Lady Jiberene was collecting round her her regiment of mercenaries and was preparing to do gallant battle in her own defence, feeling the charge against herself to be an unfair one. Miss Jacques was for a moment a kind of lionised martyr, a role she played exceedingly well, with her long, pale, tragedy face, and melancholy heavy-lidded eyes, as she stalked about the club rooms in that hearse-like head-gear, and collected adherents by repeating her tale of woe to all who would listen. She was so successful at this time that she even produced some spring flowers in her old winter toque—it is true they were dirty white laburnum over from last summer, and were mixed with bronze autumn leaves—but they were intended both as tribute to the budding season, and as an open sign of crested defiance to her enemies. So Lady Jiberene be-

came exasperated, with the truly awful and startling result that she suddenly issued invitations to an immense evening reception in the very nick of time, just catching any of her wavering followers on the shins, by leaving them out of her list. Great excitement prevailed.

The affair was to take place in a fortnight, bringing it to the week following Easter week, and there were murmured hints that it was to be on an immense scale, larger than usual and much more crushed, and was to be studded with social lions, as a pound cake with plums. Was there a Hoyden who did not secretly yearn to get foot under that striped marquee and tread those sandwiched halls, whatever expressions of indignant independence they might individually utter? Certainly there was a secret and passionate longing on all sides to find out who and what would attend the festivity, and those of Lady Jiberene's club-fellows who were not asked themselves, had each managed to post a special spy representing herself among the ranks of the chosen.

But Lady Jiberene threw a preliminary shell or two before fighting operations were actually due to begin.

"One hears such interesting things," she said to a group about her one day. "Our dear, pretty Mrs. Fresne is, I am told, quite a somebody, and has seen very different days in India before she lost her husband. She moved in quite the regulation set, visited at the vice-regal court, and so on. Really, most gratifying, after one has tried to do something to help her!"

"Have you persuaded her to talk of herself at last, then?" said one. "I'm sure I have tried quite often, and in the most delicate ways, but I never could get a word, though I screwed and screwed!"

"Oh, I have it on better authority. I have it," said Lady Jiberene, glancing round the group, "from Mrs. Courtman!"

The bomb was hurled with great effect. "She and I," she continued, "have been friends for some time, and it seems she knew Mrs. Fresne some years ago in India. It is all very interesting, as dear Mrs. Fresne may have—has, I believe—already had a few pricks to endure here owing to the strange aversion of others. But I shall reinstate her so far as I am able by *inviting her to my party.*"

The bomb here burst into a thousand pieces. A few of the projectiles went on devastating.

"Mrs. Courtman is coming, and will like to meet her," added Lady Jiberene thoughtfully. The group, which had been sitting round in a ring here got up almost as one woman, and darted off in different directions to spread the extraordinary news. Like the radiations of a star they spread out their wild course in all directions, leaving Lady Jiberene with a faithful crony only, a move which she seemed quite to expect, and for which she indirectly had deliberately worked. But Mary, when caught alive round a stuffy office corner, by the heroine of the hour, and invited in so many words to the party, was aghast and full of excuses.

"It's sweet of you to think of me, dear Lady Jiberene," she said in a flustered manner. "But you must let me decline, indeed you must. Nowadays that sort of gaiety is quite out of my line. I have had much misfortune. I never got into society. I haven't done so for years."

"Oh, but you must *now*, you know," said Lady Jiberene, in her most saccharine manner.

"But—thank you so much—only, you know, really, I am so poor. To tell you the truth I haven't any evening clothes!"

"Oh, you are so pretty. In any clothes you would look quite delight. Now *do* say you will come—just to please me!"

"Please, please Lady Jiberene, let me think it over. To please you, who have always been so kind to me, I would do much. But don't you see that as I never have gone out for so long——"

"Oh, of course. But now that you are at the Hoydens you are 'somebody,' and can't avoid publicity. Do come. Mrs. Courtman is coming. I have seen her since that day you met her. She asked after you, and said she should like to meet you again."

"Did she? That was very nice of her. But, dear Lady Jiberene, see how smart you will all be! After all, I am only a poor woman who earns her own living, am I not? Oh, do let me off, and I will be eternally grateful to you for asking me. But—but—I live in a corner of life, you know. I am not for any light and sunshine."

However, Lady Jiberene was obdurate. She even played on Mary's gratitude, knowing quite well that one so sensitive to

kindness would hardly like to defy the very donor of her means of livelihood in such a manner, and for reasons so vague. To Lady Jiberene Mary was only shy. She—good, hardy, unsensitive soul, had no secrets, and she could not understand what she called a “nice” woman having any either. She had decided in her own mind that Mary was a “nice” woman. Would she not listen for hours to descriptions of Lady Jiberene’s childrens’ illnesses, and the reasons why they had certain doctors and dentists?—the sure signs of a “nice” woman! Would she not smile patiently while Lady Jiberene descanted on the doings of her son at Eton, and how he had become captain of his house’s team, and could wear his house’s colours, and was reported to be surpassingly good at quite everything except the mere alphabet? What better or more distinct proof of “niceness” than this?

So Mary, distinguished and ratified by Cecil Jiberene’s measles, or Eric’s diphtheria, and Doris’ Italian lessons, was expected to appear at my lady’s party, in order to crush the enemy

CHAPTER VI

THERE are some women, even in London, to whom an invitation is an invitation, pure and simple. Into that idyllic state of mind no suspicion enters that the harmless looking printed card in the third person expresses more than a bland desire on the part of somebody to give you pleasure. Experience after experience to the sordid contrary will never happily shake this dear belief in childlike minds.

Mary's was one of such.

All that bothered her was a frock. She had nothing suitable, except a very, very ancient and soiled affair at the bottom of a box, amongst her possessions.

On coming home from the club, she started matters by lighting her sitting-room fire, in a first attempt after inspiration. The nights were still cold, but luckily the wood was resinous and snapped joyously in the burning, and it may have sparkled into her imagination, for, as her mind flew over depressing calculations of cheap and common silk "robes" bought half made, and capable of being used up later as ordinary frocks—she had determined to wear black—it suddenly occurred to her that she had some exquisite Indian hand-embroidery that should help, at least, to save her pocket.

She went to a deep box in her bedroom and got this out. It was black, soft, silky stuff of the crêpe-de-chine order, and a design of grapes and vine leaves was beautifully and simply worked in silver. There was not much of it, but enough with care to make a *raison d'être* for a black evening dress, and by the addition of some more silk, and yet more skill, a very modest and graceful garment. Those silver grapes decided her.

"After all," she said, "I am not so very old. And that sort of thing cheers one up. Lately, I have been thinking I was perhaps overdoing this solitary life. Lady Jiberene is a dear. I've half a mind to go!"

So, on her earliest opportunity, she chose the black soft silk

to go with the embroidery, and carefully calculating her resources, bought enough and proceeded to make up the dress. She was clever with her needle, and her taste was simple and good, but it was a good thing for her that Easter intervened, and gave her a fortnight's grace in which to complete the garment, for it had to be stitched at very late at nights and it got along only slowly in consequence.

But it was to her the symbol in some sort of returning hope and youth after dark years of trouble, and even in some way connected with those dead jonquils in the Benares bowl.

Thrifty being, she would not cut the embroidery, and arranged it to fall clinging to the figure in front, making a *directoire* panel that melted imperceptibly into the plain, soft, trailing black of the rest. The little open square at the top, edged with silver, showed her fine neck, and her bright brown hair shone out in warm contrast. She had no evening cloak, so she used up a shepherd's plaid one day she had, with a fluffy shawl inside it, and when the great night came, slipped out of her drear retreat and gained a 'bus whose route brought her to the Park, dropping her close to Sussex Place. She had to put on a hat—her little shabby street would have shrieked, might even have stoned her, had she ventured forth from its shades with her head uncovered—and in this most humble manner made her way to the great festivity. She could tell the house far in the distance by the flood of light streaming from it, and the string of carriages.

There was the striped marquee of Hoyden celebrity, meandering out from the hall door and Greek pillars, right across the pavement. Carriages were arriving in dozens, and this guest felt meek indeed, as, much to the scorn of a footman, she slipped into the glorified and brilliantly lighted aisle from the side, and made her way up the red-carpeted steps to the inner glories beyond, hat and all. The very cloakroom maids stared at that hat. They could not conceive of a lady coming in one. They could not, however, conceive of the extremely personal nature of the remarks that Mary's neighbours in Loder Street would have been likely to make had she gone without it. And, as she said to herself philosophically, the maids' bad opinion was the easier to bear of the two terrors.

But divested of her old check cloak and shawl, she created another impression. Even the maids saw the fine carriage of

the head, and the uncommon silver embroidery of her attire, and when she was shown up to the reception-room, she was a little overwhelmed by finding that, for a person living in "life's corners" she attracted an amazing amount of attention by just walking into the room.

The crush was all Hoyden tradition had painted it. If you were standing up, you had to remain so, and if sitting down, nothing could effect your uprising save a united effort on the part of the entire row of victims huddled together, just as a number of persons tightly packed in a church pew must move in concert or not at all. Not unhappily for Mary, she was permitted to remain standing, and she began after five minutes to be thankful that she had brought a little Indian fan, of mother-of-pearl and silver, that away in the Loder Street lodgings had seemed really too grand. Now, in the blaze of colour and jewels around her, it looked a simple enough toy. As for her dress it was nothing against the "creations" in the midst of which she found herself fixed. Lady Jiberene was most radiant and fussy, as usual, and dragged her further into the blaze of the chiet salon, rather tactlessly "pleased to see her looking so pretty and so appropriately dressed," though she meant the praise kindly. In such a mixed crowd any garment would have passed muster, so far as that went.

Mary had completed her greeting of her hostess, and was standing a little to one side, deeply interested in the movements of one of the ladies seated in a crammed row by the wall, who, seeing a tall and beautiful stranger wearing a gown of real lace, momentarily stranded close to her, had picked up a flounce of this in one hand and was examining it closely through her lorgnette! The owner of the lace attire was unconscious of the impudent scrutiny going on behind her own back, and looked back a little coldly at Mary, over whose ready face a ripple of amazed laughter was beginning to dimple. Just then Mary turned aside and beheld Cartyn struggling through a solid group to get at her. She impulsively met him half-way, unspeakably glad in the loneliness of this crush to see his thin, expressive face turned genially to hers. They made a little island to themselves directly he succeeded in gaining her. She, at least, forgot the rest of the people with that completeness of oblivion only possible in a hopeless crush, and he, his eyes on the vision of her first appear-

ing in her true class and its adornments, apparently forgot even himself too. The light of deep admiration and regard in his face would have been as clear as the rose-light of dawn to anybody who had chanced to look or care, but no one did, and its only effect was a real rose-glow on Mary's frank face and fair neck, as with a sudden leap of her heart she felt its potency herself.

"I knew you were coming," said Cartyn; "Lady Jiberene told me you were. I've been waiting to see you. Aren't you late?"

"Why, yes. But I can't leave my dear Hoydens just when I want. And besides—I came in a 'bus!"

He laughed.

"Like that?"

"Oh, dear no—in an old cape and hat. Loder Street would never have survived evening garments."

"Well," he said, "it would be a pity to dazzle the ginger rabbit! Do you remember him?—in a cage at the corner of your street? I always fancy he guards you like a watchdog."

"Do you?"

"Una and a rabbit! Why not?"

"Oh, it's more homely than a lion, so I don't mind. Besides some lions are really hard to tell from rabbits or guinea-pigs, especially those in Trafalgar Square."

"Some lions *are* guinea-pigs," said Cartyn. "Do you see that man over there—the one with long hair and a badge of sorts?—he is one of the lions of the evening, but will do anything you ask him almost for a guinea. You can combine the several qualities of each. But come and talk to me—have you been arranging jonquils lately?"

He piloted her over to a cooler seat, and they stayed there, she never knew how long, in a conversation purely delightful to them both, because surrounded by gaiety and chatter, it had no interruptions and no special claims to be serious. For the first time, Cartyn saw her separated from her unutterable sadness; saw what she had been in the happier past, and could be in the future, the ideal of most good men—merry, kind, tender, yet reserved, remote, and stilly heroic. He could not guard his eyes as he guarded his tongue. Again and again, as he talked his merry nonsense, the strange picture of this frank little woman struggling for daily bread in undeserved adversity, made

his heart dilate with impulsive pity and admiration beyond words to express.

When, sometime later, Lady Jiberene came up and claimed him for attendance upon a terrific lady in brown chiffon and pink roses, he went as a person rises out of a dream to return to hard duty. As for Mary, she too was borne off in her hostess' wing to the presence of Mrs. Courtman, who was queening matters eagerly in another of the big rooms, or salons. She greeted Mary with forced graciousness. Her eyes, handsome though they were, looked burnt with inward excitement and feverishness, and her every movement was hurried and fluttering; so reducing her rich and beautiful attire to an odd effect of excited gaudiness, instead of exquisite repose. She took Mary almost abruptly by the arm, saying, "I want to speak to you. Do get away from this crew for a minute. I asked Lady Jiberene to tell me when you came. Aren't these people too hideous? Did you ever see anything so frightful? That frump over there with her wig coming off—she's just married a boy who fagged for her sons at Eton! She's showing him round London now. I believe she's taking him to the Zoo and Madame Tussaud's—what things people will do, won't they? That's a pretty frock. How well you look after all these years! You improve with time, I declare. Now, here we are at a nice quiet spot if we can only hold on to it. I *do* so want a talk."

Mary, who had been struggling after her through the crush in sheer bewilderment, now sat down by her side at a small table in the supper-room and prepared to listen to yards more of such talk. But, after offering her some slight refreshment, Florence suddenly subsided into short, pertinent questions.

"I haven't forgotten our old friendship—have you?"

"No, indeed.

"I heard—I heard you were not left too well off? May I ask such a thing?"

"It is obvious in itself," said Mary quietly, and suddenly on her guard against other questions. "I should not otherwise work at that club as I do."

"Oh, don't be offended. I only wanted to lead up to—to——"

"Yes?"

"To a suggestion I wanted to make. I'm well off, as you know. If you'd rather not work—not work at that horrid club (on

aren't they a set of dowds?) would you let an old—one who has known you for years, make you a little contribution to your yearly income? Now don't——"

For Mary had half risen. She had flushed and then turned suddenly pale.

"You are more than good," she answered almost inaudibly, and her eyes filled with tears; "but I could not accept——"

"Yes, yes, you easily could," urged Florence eagerly, her eyes not meeting her friends, however. "It could be put into your bank. Such a little. If you would *only* let me! Think it over. There, say no more now. For the old days' sake, you know. Oh, don't be cross, I'll write. So long as you're not offended——"

Mary put out her hand and laid it over Mrs. Courtman's, her heart too full to find voice. Strangely enough the hand was jerked rapidly away from hers. The action struck a chill.

"There," said Florence rising quickly, "let us say no more now. No, no thanks. Please!"

She hurried Mrs. Fresne away back to the crowded rooms again and easily lost her. But Mary, bewildered and touched by such utter generosity remained for some time alone in a crowded corner, thinking over this strange offer. Then, seeing the time, she went and made her adieux to her hostess. Cartyn was waiting in the hall when she came out of the cloak-room transformed once more into her old self in plain hat and check cape.

"We go the same way," he said. "May I take you back?"

She could not refuse, and together they got into the homeward bearing hansom. Mary's eyes were shining. She was full of Mrs. Courtman's offer, and he, noticing that she seemed abstracted, at last said, "Well, did you meet any good fairies to-night?"

"One," she said, turning on his a brilliant look; "an old, old friend—Mrs. Courtman. Someone I knew well in the old days at Bahore."

Then, impulsively and noting his keen face bent to hers, and knowing his expressed interest in her affairs, she told him briefly what Florence had said. His face became suddenly grave; he started. "She has offered you money?" he said quite sharply.

"She put it nicer than that," pouted Mary. "She called it a gift for the old days' acquaintance sake—she——"

Cartyn leaned over her in the cab, placing his hand earnestly

on both of hers in a tight grip, his face suddenly set and white in the flicker of the cab-lamp.

"For God's sake, do not take it," she said.

She let her hand stay under his in entire astonishment. She glanced at him quite squarely, forgetting even the thrill of their personal nearness in her real surprise. She said, because he still held the hand and looked at her so—

"But I don't understand."

"No, indeed," he persisted with eagerness; "how could you? Only let me beg of you in the name of all you hold sacred, not to accept this woman's money. I have a reason." She softly moved her hand away from his grasp.

"But this is very strange of you, Mr. Cartyn! What am I to make of it? Mrs. Courtman is an old friend—I knew her years ago. I did not say I should accept her offer. I simply told you she had made it. I was so overjoyed at—at so much friendship from one who knew me in the past." Her voice wavered a little.

Again he put out his hand and touched her arm.

"I beg you," he said, "to trust me. I implore you to believe that I am not interfering through any idle prejudice or fancy of my own, but in your most sacred interests."

"Yes, yes," said Mary impatiently; "but this is not called for at all! I should think very long and seriously before letting my friend do anything for me. I suppose I have a little pride ____"

"Good heavens, yes. That is not what I meant."

"I can go on as I have done—better perhaps, rather than be beholden to any one, even a friend. Still, Mr. Cartyn, I do not understand your tone. You seem to have some strange dislike to Mrs. Courtman—do you know her, then?"

"Yes," said Cartyn slowly. "I know her, since you ask."

"Then, even knowing her yourself, you must not, please, use that disparaging tone to me. She is my old friend. We were together at Bahore. She knew my husband."

Cartyn bowed. "I will say no more—I *can* say no more," he answered. "Only let me beg of you to think kindly of my motives in speaking as I did—as kindly as you can. If you knew," he was going to say, "what I know," but checked him-

self. "If you saw things as I see them you would understand. You would know me for a friend."

Mary turned her eyes, whimsical with bewilderment, on to his earnest face and studied him a moment.

"I should always believe in your kindness and friendship," she said; "but really I fail to understand you just now. So shall we change the subject? We are nearly home. There is Loder Street—I am afraid your rabbit has gone to bed. See, his shop is shut up. He is much more law-abiding and respectable than we are!"

She laughed again in her old way as she alighted quickly from the cab-step and bade him "Good-night," and she would not have the cab drive up to her door, but stopped at the end of the street, for motives not unlike those of Mrs. Gilpin who would not have the "chaise and pair" nearer than two doors away.

Cartyn tried to laugh with her, but his face was grave and serious as he walked the short distance home. He dismissed the cab and took his course gladly, feeling the still night air cooling on his brow, and yielding like any other man to the necessity for at least physical action in the face of this new danger.

Because it was a new danger. If this cruelly treated woman were persuaded to take money, on whatever excuse, Mrs. Courtman would then consider herself free of all responsibility in the matter, and his own hold over her would be gone. And who could tell Mary that the money would be the price of her own honour? No one, since only he knew it to be that, and he had no right to speak.

He came to the vicarage door; he glanced at it with new eyes before putting in his key.

"A door copied from one of the doors at Glastonbury!" he said. All those iron nails ought to make one feel quite satisfied to shut out 'the world' and its concerns. But somehow, to-night, I can't. It used to be quite easy to go in at a Norman arch and completely forget other people's human bothers. I remember when I first saw that door and knew it to be my own, I felt that my parochial outfit was pretty complete! To-night it is positively irritating. I suppose it's the empty symbolism.' "

He stood a moment on the step, and glanced back at the house:

and streets and chimneys looming through the clear silver night: the vast unknown place he called his parish. Under those roofs and chimneys lay a million difficulties, yet a million possibilities: and he was answerable for his part—his larger priestly part—for hundreds of these, he said. Until lately he had never dreamed that he was anything but perfectly fitted to the task. It had all been a very simple matter—an excellent career at the University, with honours, followed by a brief curacy and then those ten years of eminently successful slum work. In a sense it had all been ready-made for him, and had undoubtedly prospered under his serene self-confidence and marked powers of organisation. Of course, souls were not complicated. You just collected them and applied the Church's infallible rules and there you were. It had all been simple enough, especially in the slums where they counted Communicants in good round numbers, and whipped up the people in vigorous style. They had always said, in the East End, that they "hummed." A time was when he would have tossed aside this problem as lightly as Brother Anselm had done, only on different lines. Not so very long ago he had indignantly asked himself what ordinary man could comprehend such women as Florence Courtman. Now he had begun to see that the true shepherd had no right to be an ordinary man at all.

He felt pettishly angry at the set of circumstances that had shaken his clerical officialism as a terrier shakes a rat. His pride in his pastoral powers was rudely beaten.

What, so far, had he done that had helped anybody in this affair? Utterly nothing. He said, as he went up to bed past the Peruginos, and the jerry-Gothic staircase windows—

"A London parson is like a doctor who knows his cures—and doesn't know his patients!"

CHAPTER VII

THE next day, Sunday, made any further action for the moment impossible. He got a glimpse of Florence's hat and face in the crowded service. She was waving a fan to and fro, imagining it to be hot. When she did this, she rattled like castenets or fire-irons. She might have been dressed in chain armour. She wafted a strong odour of Lavendar water at the same time. She hated it, but she wore it always in church as being especially used by religious ladies, it made her feel good. Her eyes bistered and pensive, looked at anything but her book. She continually fidgeted, and shot little reports caused by silks suddenly jerked, and cracking gloves dragged fussily off and on, and violent and sweeping sighs on to the otherwise calm air. He was too far away to hear it over the choir's performances, but he knew the little fusilade was going on as well as the pew neighbours did.

While one of his curates intoned the service in a perfectly unintelligible sing-song, highly pitched and through a very thin nose, the vicar glanced at the waving feathers and flowers that, seen from his elevated seat, represented his congregation, and made a pathetic resolve to try to see if he couldn't understand these people more.

They were not, never could be, Ursula Limpoles. Brother Anselm would have, indeed, raved at them as Savonarola raved at the ladies of Florence. But the vicar, sitting away in the shadowy sedilia, had to-day a first faint suspicion that that would have been too crude, even ridiculous. He said to himself that it was very easy, after all, to look at a lot of women in pretty hats and condemn them sweepingly as frivolous. They would even be rather flattered and self-congratulatory over it.

You could have stood up and entertained them, certainly, with an account of the more lurid sins of society, but probably you would not have before you one single person who committed

these. It would be like telling an eczema patient how to cure cancer.

"Well," he said to himself, "I'll begin now to try and understand these people—that sort of woman—better. The greatest saints" he glanced over at an Augustine in magenta in one of the windows, with enormous royal blue feet, "knew the world. Were quite worldly to do good. I must learn that."

So the next morning he was up early.

He had an early service, and some accounts to look into before the 9.30 vicarage meeting, when his curates, missionaries, deaconess, nurse, and other church officers came for the weekly business, minute, urgent, necessary, of a briskly worked parish. The worldly war began unpicturesquely. The infinite troubles of the vexed question of schools, the infinite littlenesses of a state officialism determined on persecution, even if it was only taking a gentle and worried headmaster to task for the over-lavish use of slate-pencils, all had to be put before the vicar, and arbitrated and settled with what patience he might muster.

And the crowd of his colleagues and assistants flocked in one by one to the large, bare, chilly dining-room, where, for all the handsome oak furniture copied from a famous abbey, the dark crimson rep curtains were dingy, and the fire—newly lighted by a cross and tardy housemaid—anything but genial. The church-window shaped pictures on the walls were good copies of famous Fra Angelicos, but that in no way obliterated the fact that the damp sticks in the grate, and the rarely used chimney was producing a thin, nauseous smoke that filled the room, and clung to anything shiny that it came across, preferably the verger's bowsprit-shaped nose. Every one was anxious to get his particular work done first. Tolley, the verger, gave voice to really trying home-truths about the clerk, over a question of wedding fees, said to have been whisked from their original destination. The clerk, unmoved and very patronising, was inclined to place too much pitying stress on Tolley's short-sightedness and venerable age, and occasionally gave point to his remarks by lightly tapping his own forehead, a most dangerously personal point, likely to rouse ill-feeling. A large, blundering Manchester curate, not unlike a big retriever shaking itself after a plunge in muddy water, bellowed forth somewhat crude reasons for a notorious disturbance in the church lads' brigade, and

tossed these reasons after the fashion of mud-splashes at the head of a clean and superior young ecclesiastic with very prominent finger-tips, turned out most beautifully complete from Keble, with an entire and perfect theory of theology and human nature capable of being contained on his own thumb-nail.

Between these the vicar must arbitrate. The Manx reformer, in a brogue, sometimes a deep bass and sometimes a hysterical squeak, had volumes to say. The Keble ecclesiastic had more to look, and the exact potency of well-posed finger-tips and a superior smile in a dispute of this volcanic nature began to interest Cartyn as a study in the ethics of voiceless argument, and made him lose a little interest in the exact cause of all the scene, till a shake of his conscience brought him back to the fact that this was, in spite of its laughable combatants, a serious matter involving the welfare of his boys, a thing he must try to remember.

Other matters claimed him—the nurse's report, with several requests from the poor parishioners, nothing if not cool, *i. e.* a poor widow woman (never at church, and a notorious gossip and idler), demanded an entirely new set of teeth, for the church to gladly provide.

"What has she done with her own?—talked them away?" said Cartyn.

The nurse smiled deprecatingly. She did but repeat the requests. She had her own opinion as to their impudence.

"She says, 'Why should she keep the Church of England if we don't give her the teeth?'" said this demurely bonneted lady.

"Tell her when she keeps the Church of England she shall have her teeth," he answered, then laughed, and in a lower voice made some inquiries as to the real merits of the case. All the nurse could say, however, was that the woman certainly had none and her health was bad.

The deaconess now raised a modest head. "May I speak, sir? Is it Mrs. Tripp? I, too, have heard about the teeth. She says if she had them she could and would turn over a new leaf and begin to get her own living, instead of depending on her poor children. I could keep her to that promise. It would be a charity to the children."

"What does she propose to do, then, if she gets these teeth?" said the vicar. "How will she earn her living?"

"She's going to get married!" put in the verger, with a sharp raucous snap, as though closing the conversation.

Even the vestry meeting laughed. The verger glanced round the ring and added—

"Nails is enough. Don't give her no teeth. Lots of 'em gets to the Police Court on nails alone. Think of the pore man!"

The verger was shut up, and a consultation with the deaconess resulted in a letter for the Dental Hospital being provided for the toothless lady who not only kept the Church of England, but could induce a second husband to keep her. A long discussion over the petty persecutions of the school officers followed this debate, and the whole morning was gone before Cartyn found himself free to think out any definite plan as regarded his own affairs.

Even when he did get free of his regiment of workers, and put on his hat to go to a C. O. S. meeting that he could just manage to work in, he found himself waylaid and followed by Mr. Holden, the churchwarden, whose wife had followed Mary to the vestry.

There was a dulness, a calm, insensitive weight about Mr. Holden that made him difficult to shake off at any time, and Cartyn resigned himself to seven minutes of his companionship as they made their way along the long, dark streets to the C. O. S. offices. The churchwarden's grey, rather curly hair grew like a monk's tonsure in a ring above a fat neck, arranged in a roll, and his walk was a rolling swing; he was a retired Civil servant, who had married a rich wife, and who, being himself kept in order at home, was sometimes sent forth to keep the church in order. This he did perfunctorily—with qualms, but with the best intentions.

"Off to another meeting?" he said, with lumbering playfulness.

"Yes—C. O. S.," said Cartyn. "I shall just have time." He glanced at his watch.

"Whatever time do you lunch?"

"Oh, it's a movable affair. To-day not till two o'clock, I expect."

"Ah—ah!" said Mr. Holden, shaking a fat forefinger remonstratingly "Shocking for the digestion, vicar, shocking! You're

too young to have one, you'll say. But my advice is, get a wife before you do, eh?"

"A wife—or teeth?" said Cartyn.

"Ha, ha! Oh, I mean a nice girl to see to your home comforts, and look after things—see you come in to meals at proper hours, and all that."

Mr. Holden was himself to rigidly "seen" to come in to meals at proper hours, that, of course, he spoke with much feeling; there may also have been other feelings behind his advice, as he had two daughters both anxious to occupy the vicarage themselves.

Cartyn only laughed shortly, so Mr. Holden rambled on.

"You're a public man—they'll look for you to marry one day. and to marry a woman likely to be popular in the parish, a leader, and all that. That's a parson's duty, so I've heard. Well, well, there are plenty to be found."

"Duties?" said Cartyn.

"No, no, clever, managin women," said Mr. Holden airily. "Women who keep things going, give teas, lead the other ladies, and all that! Proper, serious sort of women: not too good-looking, nor too dressy, but just sensible, with everything to everybody in the place, so that nothing can be said, you know. I knew a man, canon he was of one of our big Colonial cathedrals, who ruined himself and his church because he married a woman about whom people said things. Yours is a fine parish—you ought to give us a good sensible lady at the head of things!"

He laughed weakly, as people do who try to cover an impertinence. Cartyn felt annoyed, but only said—

"Really, she sounds very bad for the digestion. She would frighten me into a health craze. Pray don't expect her yet awhile, Mr. Holden."

He managed to get rid of his fussy adviser as well as he could. Even in a mission to "the world," he was not obliged to include bores—at any rate, advising bores. Even the precept of "suffering fools gladly" does not go so far as to include advising ones. They are surely beyond the pale of even super-human endurance?

Cartyn made straight for Darnley Gardens. He was determined to get at Florence, preferably when she was unprepared,

and settle something. He was also—rather pathetically—determined not to be shocked at anything. In fact, to meet “the world” and the spirit thereof with the broadest spirit. He was prepared to smile at anything. He said he was turning over a new leaf. He would meet these people on their own ground.

So he put on what he thought was a winning smile, when he entered Florence’s untidy room, and cleared his throat uneasily.

She got up to greet him a little tousled and confused, with something like a blush on her heavy face. She rose like Aphrodite from a perfect sea of cushions, and terrifically ugly little dogs, creatures entirely lacking in the faintest trace of canine candour or dignity. They had watery eyes and snub noses. A faint Zoolike odour permeated insistently through the heavy Persian perfume with which, apparently, most of the furniture was saturated. A certain mad confusion of all the room’s decorative gew-gaws—Florence would have called it “*abandon*”—gave away her age far more than her eagerly frivolous manner did. She had been a woman celebrated for being “fascinating” fifteen years ago, and she still kept, in her furniture, to dated insignia.

But the vicar thought, “Ah, how modern!” or thought he ought to be thinking so. He turned away from the repulsive dogs, and glanced round vaguely for something to shock him at which he was not going to be shocked. Florence soon came to the rescue.

“So sweet of you to come! Do look at Du Du,” she cried, holding up one of the ratty things apparently by its red neck-ribbon. “Isn’t he naughty? He eats four cutlets a day! At least he did yesterday. Now he is ill.”

Cartyn glanced at the appalling animal. He tried hard not to be shocked, and to forget that two poor families in his parish had been found that morning with no food in the house, having had none at all yesterday. “The world” had begun with a conundrum.

“You know, Mrs. Courtman,” he began, taking no notice of the dog, “you and I have never had a really friendly talk, have we, about all—all you told me? If I have been too hard I have come to apologise.”

She dropped the dog and glanced at him rather furtively,

playing with a pink coral necklace that she wore over her dress collar.

"Why, now you're really nice," she said. "You *are* rather cross sometimes, you know. I think you're particularly down on me, I don't know why."

She sighed and thinned her voice into a sort of plaintive baby whine, at one time thought very fascinating, even when used by a large woman.

"Well, well, you must forgive me. One does not always understand——"

"No, no. Of course not. Bachelors don't." He started.

"A man in my profession has to learn pretty gradually how to help others—help women," he added.

"He never learns, does he?—till one thing."

"What is that?"

"Till he loves."

She said it very softly, still in the minute voice. She had sunk back to her cushions, and her ringed hand, a very pretty one, rested on one of the lap-dogs' heads. She was watching him very closely.

He laughed uneasily. This was still not what he had quite expected.

"I hope our ministry does not rest on so—so slight a thing as that!" he said.

"Slight? Ah, men will do much for love. Some men will. *You* would. I could see that in your face when I first saw you."

"But our ministry——"

"Ministry? Oh, I thought you spoke of helping women."

"So I do. We try."

"Oh, yes, with frumps. The question is do *they* matter to the world? I mean the large world—London, and all that?"

"It's just London and all that I want to try and understand and help. If you include yourself in 'all that,' give me credit for thinking that you matter, and forget the 'frumps.'"

He had a way, supremely guileless, of looking very straightly into the eyes of any one to whom he was speaking, with his head a little on one side. It is a tradition of Newman, that Archbishop Temple complained of in one of his Oxford letters as being badly copied by perfectly sincere and often uncon-

scious men. Cartyn was one of these. But Florence dropped her handsome eyes, and smiled coquettishly at it. She did not know Newman.

"Don't look at me so piercingly!" she cried in mock alarm. "It is naughty of you. I know I'm not all I ought to be. But I haven't forgotten what you said about Mrs. Fresne, and I'm going to put all that matter right—indeed I am—for your sake, Mr. Cartyn."

"For my sake? Oh no. But, really, are you—are you going to make it right?"

He looked suddenly, fearfully eager—too eager.

"Yes. To please you."

"Well?"

"It is settled."

"You will restore her good name?"

"Well, the same thing."

"What—you will see the trustees?"

"No, no; not quite that. But to please you I have offered, have arranged to give her an annuity in the name of our old acquaintance. That will settle it—put it all right."

His eager face fell. She said it at once. "You aren't pleased, after all."

He did not look so. His hopes had risen at her words, but he now saw that he had got no further in the matter after all.

"Can't you just see," he said gently, if eagerly, remembering that he was trying to be patient with "the world," "that an annuity does not clear her good name? From you it is surely something very like the price of it?"

"Well, but who knows? Nobody. All those people in Bahore have forgotten ages ago. That old tabby of a Lady Jiberene came fussing to me before her party trying to ask a few questions; but I said only the nicest things. I told how she went to the vicereine's ball, and even said I wanted to meet her again, and got her invited. And so I did, to suggest this annuity to her. She herself was pleased, anyhow!"

"Yes, yes. But, don't you see she doesn't know who harmed her? That makes all the difference."

"Pshaw! Not it. Women don't split points like that over getting money nowadays. Things are too expensive. People can't afford to be so heroic. Besides, there isn't time. And

there isn't time. And what does an old scandal matter to a pretty woman in London, anyhow?"

Cartyn suddenly forgot to be nice to "the world." His eyes blazed, though he steadied his voice and said after a pause—

"I believe her to be—though this is quite beside the point—a woman whose honour is her first consideration."

"Oh dear, yes—very solemn, and all that. Still, Mr. Cartyn, with a nice little income and her good looks—she really looked like her old self that night at Lady Jiberene's—weren't you there? Yes, with a little settlement and her looks, I was saying, she might easily marry some quite nice man who wouldn't bother, then all would be right. I can imagine her picking up with some comfortable doctor in a small country town, or——"

"How dare you?" flashed Cartyn, his voice thrilling with indignation. "I say how dare you—*you*, who have ruined a woman, pack her off, dismiss her, as spoiled goods, as rubbish, to such a fate!"

Of all the things she had said and done, of all of which he guessed her capable, nothing had infuriated Cartyn like this suggestion that Mary should be married out of pity, for a sin she had not committed! He was so far human as to feel madly angry with that country doctor who should dare patronisingly to marry Mary, even though he was but a creature of Florence's inconsequent imagination. As for Florence, she gazed at him in entire astonishment.

"I was only suggesting something quite—quite nice for her," she said. "And **aren't** you rather hard on country doctors? Well, say something else then. I'm sure *I* don't care. So long as she gets comfortably settled and off my conscience, she can marry clerks or dukes or what she pleases. It is of no consequence to me. Do I care about anything but settling this wretched feeling of regret for the past? I've told you over and over again I'm sorry now that I did it. I'm really a good woman by nature, though you might not think it. You clergy men are such sticklers at trifles. However, we need not discuss it further, Mr. Cartyn. I have spoken to her about the annuity—pension—whatever you like to call it, and the affair will shortly be, is practically settled."

"I'm sorry to contradict you," said Cartyn, in a voice quiet

and tense with feeling; "but, if I know anything about it, the matter is *not* settled."

"What do you mean?"

"I shall do all in my power to prevent Mrs. Fresne accepting a penny from you."

Florence rose from amongst her dogs and slipped her daintily clad self on a chintz ottoman, carefully fluffing up the cushions around herself, as though their artistic and luxurious arrangement supremely mattered. There was, however, a dangerous look in her eyes.

"Will you explain," she said coldly, while she examined the laces on her morning-gown sleeve with apparent attention, "why you propose doing such an extraordinary thing? And how you have any authority over Mrs. Fresne? You said you hardly knew her."

"I have not known her long; but lately I have seen more of her. I have seen enough of her plucky life to know that of her own accord she would probably refuse pecuniary assistance from any one. But that is not the point—the point is that you cannot offer a woman the price of her own good name."

"She would never know it!" flashed Florence angrily; "unless *you*——" she paused, and her eyes uttered a base suspicion.

"Once and for all, Mrs. Courtman, you must understand that I cannot speak of it. When I tell you that my honour as a priest is involved in my silence on every word that you have confided in me, perhaps you will trust me? In doing my best to persuade Mrs. Fresne not to accept this money I could rely on her trust in me as a friend. I could warn her of nothing."

"Then you and she are friends?"

"I suppose so—yes." Cartyn's voice was gravely reserved.

"Ah, then, I can see now the reason for your extreme interest in her affairs."

"We will not discuss my motives. I hope they are sincere. I can only say that if Mrs. Fresne's lonely and friendless condition appealed to your own sympathy and better feelings, it has done the same to mine. Shall we not say, Mrs. Courtman, that both you and I are interested in her, and are trying to do our best for her?"

"And yet you won't let me do my best!" said Florence petulently.

"It is not your best. It is your poorest makeshift," said he quietly. "You can do better than that!"

Florence leant back on her cushions and looked up at him.

"If it satisfies me, that is enough," she said haughtily. "I came to the Church for advice. It demands too much from me. I shall therefore go by my own conscience, and make the reparation I think sufficient. To me that annuity *is* sufficient. All I wanted was to get rid of that—that uncomfortable feeling of having done a mean and horrible trick; yes, I admit it fully—horrible trick. This will settle matters. I believe my luck will turn when this is accomplished."

Cartyn turned to go.

"Very well," he said. "Only I warn you that I have reason to believe that she will refuse."

"How."

"Because she herself told me of your offer. She seemed doubtful then about accepting. I admit I warned her."

"When was that?"

"After Lady Jiberene's party. I brought her home."

"Then," said Florence, her voice thick with passion, "since she has alienated even your interest, you, a stranger—though a kind one—from me, and taken it to herself she can deliver herself from her trouble! She shall have nothing at my hands. She took Maurice Fresne's friendship from me. Now she has taken yours! Am I doomed to be met and outdone by her at every turn? *You*, whose kind face and sermons helped me to the first attempt at seriousness I have ever made—for you to turn **against** me, through her! It is more than I can bear! She deserves her fate! I will not raise a finger to alter it!"

Cartyn turned back from the door and went over to her, holding out his hand.

"You are utterly mistaken," he said earnestly. "Mrs. Courtman, I shall never—never lose my most intense interest in your sad trouble and all that concerns you. Can you suppose that pity for your friend can in the least alter my friendship for, and interest in, you?"

She took his hand, but perfunctorily.

"There are degrees," she said, "of friendship."

"A pastor should have no degrees—in prayer," he said.

"Oh—prayer." Mrs. Courtman tossed her head. "I suppose you will say you pray for me?"

"I do, indeed."

"But you think of her?"

"Praying and thinking are one."

"No, really. Praying is thinking of people at given times. But thinking, without prayer, goes on all the day through."

"I hope my 'given times' are more help to you than vague thinking."

"Still you evade the question, I note! Oh, yes, it's plain enough. You, too, have been struck by her face." She laughed angrily. "You, too, see it all from her point of view! How like a man!"

"You have no right to say that," he said, his face suddenly scarlet.

"Right or not, it is true. I am a candid person, as you have probably found out, and I tell you," she glanced over at him mockingly, her petulant head thrown back, "you are in love with her!"

He thought he had never heard a woman's laugh sound quite so hideous. The whole history of her petty selfishnesses snarled in its thin, high note. Even some tricks of fascination show the skeleton underneath. This one did.

He turned away, bewildered and furious with himself and her. St. Augustine surely had not to deal with such perversities as this. But now, the droop of his incurably boyish head, his petulant—"Well, good-bye," said over his shoulder were too much for her. She got up from her cushions and went towards him softly. Her dress rustled delicately. Her eyes were shining.

"Mr. Cartyn, a moment!" she said.

He turned. She stood with her eyes cast down. She looked rosy, full-blown, coquettish, strange. What did it mean?

"Yes," he said, with one glance and turning his eyes away, instinctively, in disgust at something vaguely repellent.

"Can't you see that I am—jealous!" Again the ogle. He did not answer. "It's horrid to feel jealous about a man."

"Jealous of whom?" he said sharply.

"Of her—that you like her better than me. I am jealous of Mary Fresne," she sighed.

"You always were, I think," he saidly coldly. "That was the first cause of the trouble."

"Yes, it was. You are right. You always are. Don't be angry with me. I only said that at random. Perhaps you don't—don't care for her—in that way."

"Really," he cried impatiently, pushing away from her, "we cannot discuss an acquaintance in this way. You forget yourself."

"Yes, I do—for you!" she answered, impulsively and fervently. "Listen. Do you ask me to go to the trustees, confess the whole thing? All right. It isn't impossible. I'd do it if—won't you look at me even for friendship's sake?—if I thought you—you—could care for *me*. I care for you. I'll be honest. Don't you—can't you——"

He shook the dust off his feet.

That night a note reached him from her. It was the curtest thing she had ever written, or rather splashed, and it was not scented for once. It stated that he need not think of her or her affairs again, ever. Their friendship was over. She had started that afternoon for the Continent. She considered their mutual interests at an end.

CHAPTER VIII

"THE wretched woman takes me for an ordinary man!" was his furious cry. "It is intolerable."

For the first moment the insult drowned all coherent thought. To be taken for a mere man of the world, for a flirt, for a possible lover! After all his successful years as a romantically imagined celibate, at least, if not a vowed one. After all his triumphs as a churchman! After all the thousand little rigidities that covered his naturally boyish manners with a growth of spiky mannerisms—things so carefully learnt, so patiently practised in the dear desire for orthodoxy! To be taken for this, by such a woman! What had he left undone in his protecting pose that his attitude of priest to penitent should be so wickedly misinterpreted? He asked himself where the fault lay. Had he not kept almost strictly to that chant voice in Florence's worldly presence? He said he had, so far as he was aware. Had he not been stern? He was certain he had. He would not pet the dogs. The woman was mad. He forgot Mary Fresne in his furiously hurt vanity. He forgot what this new move meant for her, or if he remembered it the realisation was only secondary.

To be taken for an ordinary man. To be thought on a par with Florence's other men friends! It could not be borne.

In his wrath he shut himself up away from all feminine society, or the sound thereof, and sulked. He would have called it meditating. If he could not be St. Augustine in magenta in a meretricious stained-glass window he wouldn't play. That is not exactly as he put it to himself, but it is pretty well what the sum of his meditations, at this stage, amounted to.

The chilly Peruginos and the hall door were now a consolation. Once within their range one could indignantly try to forget, in one's own surrounding ecclesiasticism, the irreverent world outside. He said he forgot it. But he remained furious with the decamped Florence, and incidentally with all women.

He washed his hands of them he said. He made one resolve. After this he would avoid these creatures of the world as hopeless, as Brother Anselm did. He would deal only with those decent and orderly women of the Miss Ursula Limpole school, who wore unbecoming hats. He had never seen the invincible Miss Limpole, but he was quite sure he could imagine her hats. Florence and her awful confession of preference for him, of jealousy on his account, would be an everlasting warning. In such a mood he let a whole week go by. But one day one of his curates asked him to look in at the meeting of the Crafts Guild when he could spare an evening. It sounded innocuous enough, and he went. The hats of those ladies were beyond suspicion.

It was not until he reached the large, bare-looking parish room, lighted with pitiless incandescent light, and full of busy ladies, and one or two men, all at work upon articles of church decoration, and saw a familiarly fair head bending over some sewing, that he realised that Mary Fresne belonged to this affair.

He was so angry at Florence's suggestions that even the sight of Mary in a sense annoyed him. He would not glance her way. But "the world" must be encountered. And with a setting of his lips, he plunged into the vortex. The Holden family was well to the fore. Mrs. Holden, the president of the guild, who had a thin red face, and eyes set almost perpendicularly, like a hen's, was by way of being appallingly artistic. She called it "clutchah."

It was often rather trying to her friends. For instance, it caused her to take violent possession of certain persons or phases of art, and to refuse to permit anybody else to know anything about them. She said—

"Ah, Giotto!—an exponent I have rather a passion for. His colouring—too desolating!"

After this pronouncement, no other person, especially no other woman, might admire Giotto, or even know anything about him. He had become Mrs. Holden's intellectual property entirely. Henceforth she ran him. He was hers only.

She was therefore suitable as the president of the Crafts Guild and exercised a tyrannical sway over its productions, in a voice almost strangled with "cultchah." She had claw-like hands and

a thin smile in which her eyes took no part. She never wore a real colour, but only the neutral poor relations of colours. She adored hand embroidery and prehistoric looking jewellery.

But if she regarded Giotto as her property she regarded the vicar as something more, as her inalienable right. Her three unmarried daughters made him almost necessary to her very existence. On his account she hated all the parish.

She greeted him enthusiastically.

"Oh, but how delightful! To have you come in and look at our little efforts aftah the beautiful! How nice of you, Mr. Cartyn. Do come over and see this wood-carving of Miss Bryant's—so chaste. And *may* I show you the small sketch dear Ethel is making? Though 'mine own,' Mr. Cartyn, I must confess to rathah an enthusiasm for it!"

She led him to a very stiff daub done by one of her daughters. She always spoke of "rathah a passion," or "rathah a mania." She was quite capable of saying "rathah an obsession."

The vicar glanced at these treasures a little abstractedly. He wished Mrs. Fresne were not in the room. Again and again the consciousness of her presence bewildered and bothered him, and distracted him into vague answers to Mrs. Holden's high art talk. It seemed that she too must know of Florence's violent charge that he loved her, and in a kind of boyish indignation he would not glance over in her direction. It made him angry with even her.

Mrs. Holden went on—

"This is a de-ah thing, by my daughter Dominica."

"Er—yes, yes. You must be very proud of it."

"Oh—ah, we *enjoy* it."

"And—er—this ironwork? Isn't it considered good?"

The thin smile wrinkled.

"We *endure* it," she replied coldly. She pronounced it "en-juah." The ironwork was not by a Miss Holden.

As he went about the room from one to another, trying to keep up as fiercely Augustinian manner as he could, he became aware, without seeming actually to look in her direction, after the Jesuitical habit of the born cleric, that Mary was being a little neglected in this chaste assembly. She still sat sewing, her head bent, and apparently peaceful; but in all the chatter, and there was much of it and "culchahed," nobody addressed

her. When her head was bent, there were some curious little kinks in her hair near her neck. He began to wish, vaguely, that all the others were not there. He also began to wonder what he was going to do, now that Mrs. Courtman had deserted her. Even Augustine in magenta would have done something. That was only parochial.

Deciding to be only parochial, he at last broke away from the others, and went up to Mary and greeted her. His manner was a little formal. Hers a little self-conscious. She had not seen him since Lady Jiberene's party, and was feeling a trifle hurt at his silence after her confidence in the cab. He began blandly—

"And what is your work?"

"Drawn linen work," she answered demurely.

"Ah—very nice. Why drawn, though?"

"You see, I draw the threads very carefully—so. That makes a sort of opening upon which I work."

"I see."

But Miss Ethel Holden, also seeing an opening upon which she could work, now came stalking up to interrupt this dialogue for her own ends. She was a thin, dark girl like a hungry bird, and wore a dark red coat and skirt with an abnormally long back. Less definitely effusive than her mother, her metier was superciliousness, and she made constant, if silent war, upon the interloping Mary who was at one time too pretty to be endurable, and too discreet to be get-at-able by would-be enemies. That she dare speak to the vicar! Was he not, like Giotto, the Holdens' own? Here was her chance.

"And how are the Hoydens?" Cartyn was saying.

Miss Holden marched up and plunged herself straight into the conversation unasked.

"Oh, *do* you know the Hoyden Club? A most charming collection of brilliant literary women!" she said, with her back turned to Mary.

"Are they?" said Cartyn, suddenly belligerent, he could not have said why.

"Oh yes. How naughty of you to doubt it! Mother goes there—she's not a member, but she knows one of them. She knows so many people of all kinds. This is being artistic!"

"Is it really?" said the vicar. "Then I must be quite an Old Master. You should see my visiting-list!"

"Oh dear, yes," said Miss Holden deprecatingly. She suddenly turned and her jealous eye fell, possibly with intention, upon Mary as she spoke. "A *very* mixed one, no doubt!"

"Mrs. Fresne," said Cartyn, his very voice softening as he said the name, and glancing down at Mary as she went on with her linen work, "belongs to the Hoyden Club herself."

"*Do* you?" said Ethel Holden, with as much ill-bred incredulity as she could reasonably get into the phrase.

"Oh, I'm the secretary there," said Mary, half-laughing, and hardly glancing up from her work. "I do it for a salary. You can't call me literary or artistic."

"Oh-h," said Miss Holden, but she pronounced it "*E-augh*" with apparent guttural effort, very much prolonged. It contained worlds of deprecation, slighting pity, and disgust, but Mary only dimpled over her sewing, glad to see the long back of Miss Holden turned to her again. Miss Holden was of course too artistic to consort with people who earned their own living. What could be more painfully common?

But Cartyn was watching closely. The weakest point in "cat-ty" women's attacks is the fact that they never give decent men credit for being able to see through their meanest moves. At one time he would not have done so. But his recent experiences with Florence Courtman had opened his obtuse masculine eyes quite suddenly.

He now found his carefully prepared "parochialism" blazing into a quite definite and schoolboyish rage against feminine injustice and insolence. Before he had time to think of the method approved by his clerical *amour propre* (a thing he had always hitherto designated as his conscience), he found himself saying—

"Mrs. Fresne, I should like to continue the conversation you and I had in the hansom. I think I have some odd news for you. Have you heard again from your friend?"

With one supreme up-leap of superciliousness, distended eyes, and furiously pushed-out lips, the long-backed Ethel Holden stumped indignantly away. Conversation in a hansom! It was awful, incriminating, volcanic! She fled to pass on the horrible tale.

Mary looked up briefly.

"Perhaps we had better not go into such a long story here," she answered, but not ungently. "You were very kind, but perhaps I ought not to have chattered about my affairs. It is pretty well over and forgotten by now. A week has passed." Her self-conscious, hurt tone, brought back all his clerical vanity and nervous terrors. Groups of the Crafts Guild were already glancing in their direction. Was she, too, making too much of his interest?

"Really, I am anxious to give any assistance," he said, with drawal chilling his tone. "Of course you must know, as a clergyman—I——"

"You find women and their quarrels a great nuisance," retorted Mary, tossing her chin. She rose abruptly, and folded up her work, quickly for her, who had slow, deliberate ways.

"Now, really——"

"Yes, really. We *are* a bother. Good-night, Mr. Cartyn. I am always off early like this. I have to be up pretty early to get to work."

She slipped off, leaving the last protesting word on his lips unanswered. She already wore her hat, and hurried out into the spring night, passing along the pleasantly unpassengered streets to her little home. The borough council's people were watering the roads with something fresh and pungent with carbolic, and the nice clean odour and the long sweep of the wet streets under lamps seemed almost festive on this warm May night.

But she was in one of her rare tempers.

"He tries to be a man and a clergyman at the same time," she said to herself hotly. "It won't do. Now, which did God make first?—the human soul or the official? Will you have the parish's approval, or you own heart's? I thought he was above his traditions. But I see he was only trying momentarily to peep up out of the groove which has him like a vice. Well, well! Men are only children playing at life. They usually learn its meaning when they are dying of old age!"

She went back, a little embittered, to her duties at the Hoyden Club. At this hostelry vivid things were happening. The members were up in arms, and uproar prevailed against the insult offered to their chaste walls by the defiant action of Lady Jiberene. To give a big party in their very teeth, they

said, and to miss out all her opponents, but to invite the secretary, required fierce protest. And that protest took strange forms. Much of it was denoted by whisperings and gurgled laughter, half-heard conversations in alcoves, in which a great number of "S's" appeared to make up the syllables—angry women always found their "S's" very distinctly; it would be perhaps a severe comment to add that so do snakes and geese and cats, except that this happens to be one of Nature's laws, and therefore only an odd coincidence, and not to be viewed offensively.

Lady Jiberene would have had a bad time of it just now, had she been a sensitive woman. But happily for herself she was not, neither had she the tiresome faculty which distinguishes very acutely between celebrity and notoriety: she was, in fact, one of those Olympian beings who consider all notice, however unflattering, to be a tribute to greatness, and therefore felt herself ennobled and crowned rather than annoyed or humiliated by the ferment her high-handed action had caused, just as many modern politicians do. After all, she said to herself, a great society leader must encounter these crises. It is part and parcel of greatness: was it not, as such, an intense compliment? So she fussed about the club whensoever she found time to go there, and thoroughly enjoyed the sensations she created, feeling herself to have at last outdone Miss Jacques and her "crew."

But for Mary matters were not so easy. She was bound to those chaste halls by the exigencies of earning her living, and could not, like Lady Jiberene, whisk off contemptuously in a smart electric car whenever the Jacques' contingent became unbearable. She had, in fact, to bear the brunt of the whole situation in a manner she had not dreamed of when she had weakly consented to attend the party. Had she imagined the consequences of this ill-fated act, she would certainly have risked offending her kind patron, rather than bringing such a storm of indignation down upon her head. For it became only too clear to her that she was to be looked upon as Lady Jiberene's scape goat, and as such, the hands of all the Jacques' faction were determinedly against her.

Monotony, from this time forward, ceased to be her portion, for she never knew from one moment to another what form the general indignation would take. The duties of a secretary

are so unending and so various, and the limitations of a committee's power so ambiguous, that she continually found herself in most unexpected "hot water" over trifling technical matters connected with her work into which, up to the present, no one would have thought of interfering.

She was in the midst of this thrilling guerilla warfare, troubled and anxious, when to her amazement a letter arrived from Cartyn. Perhaps no one but a woman would ever know quite the joy that that little note in its small, stiff handwriting brought to her, as it arrived by an afternoon post at the arid halls of her daily occupation. It was a hot, dry May that year, and the broad blaze of afternoon sun seemed to beat into the high club windows and intensify a certain faint odour of rather old Turkey carpets and stale tea and tobacco that had become part of the place in her imagination. Sitting in a little dusty back office, in a sea of correspondence, after having received a severe "wiggling" from the committee, and several milder complaints from wandering Jacquesites, Mary received this little, firm, blue note, with its black inscription "St. Chad's Vicarage" as a messenger from a far kinder, juster world, a world of vague happiness and hope and sympathy. She connected it in some way with the sunshine and gayer airs outside, beyond the hot windows and roofs shutting her in, and in her enthusiasm at holding it in her hands as her very own, blushed softly over her stuffy desk, and smiled to herself. Only a woman, perhaps, will also understand that seeing his name signed by himself for the first time had an unspeakable fascination in it—"James Cartyn"—James! a name she had always disliked so very much. There is a tremendous charm in a man's power to hallow suddenly a name we have always hated. At that moment Mary would not have had Cartyn called Lancelot, or Perceval, or Reginald, or anything else but James—the sinister title of a king who ran away from his country, the name of Iago, the traditional name of a lackey.

Well, at all events, he was a man again for the moment! And now, like any idiotic woman, she forgot she was angry with him, and looked at that little signature as at the seal of Sant Iago d'Espada, James of the Sword, the Patron of Spain, conquering the Moorish hordes in an armour of silver scallop-shells! She was not wise—she was just silly—and when is a woman happier than that?

The note said that he would be so pleased if she would speak to him to-morrow, after the evening service. He had seen Mrs. Courtman a week ago, and would like to tell her about their interview.

She noticed that he named the vestry as the place to see him, as he would to a poor parishioner. He did not offer to come again to her house, and put jonquils in Benares bowls, or cut bread and butter.

She did not care about that. For all his sudden withdrawal into the ecclesiastical proprieties, she said she had his eyes when they lighted up, and his brown face when it went browner, and his hand when he did not know that it lingered. So she laughed almost mischievously over the grave little note, and the concession it involved, and went to the office glass and fluffed up her hair for no earthly reason.

After that the Jacquesites pricked her in vain. Miss Hyde, boy-voiced and autocratic on the subject of certain circulars not sent out: Miss Jacques about the stuffiness of the club drawin-room, the temperature of which was a thing the secretary must see to: and Mrs. Gigshaw, grinning sweet innuendoes containing carefully laid traps to catch Mary betraying herself in Hoyden politics, now ceased to be more than mere shadowy terrors, and she bore them with a good-humoured smiling patience that must have been disconcerting to all but the Jibereneites, just now in full ascendant and madly dancing.

CHAPTER IX

THE old verger sidled along the aisle, surveying the still lingering congregation with an eye baleful yet not unresponsive to the main chance, should it come his way. A Sunday evening congregation offers fewer main chances, however, than most, especially in fashionable London, and at a church like St. Chad's, famous for its music and splendid services, was composed chiefly of the classes who prefer to do something in the world themselves than wait for others to do it for them—in fact, a congregation unconsciously adopting the good Hoyden's motto of "doing things." Consequently the verger's occupation was momentarily gone, as his *raison d'être*, in his own estimation, was to do odd jobs at a brisk profit, for the unthinking fashionables, incurably addicted to the habit of tipping, who flock there by hundreds in the morning. It must be admitted, lest the honour of Mr. Cartyn as a vicar be trampled in the dust of commercialism, that the verger was not of his choosing, but was, indeed, an "ancient institution," harking back to an age of joyous bumbleism, richer in profits to traders of his class, an age when church-going was the fashion. In those palmy days the present vicar wore short holland skirts and ankle strap shoes, and was not dreamed of at St. Chad's. But though times had changed the verger had remained, and was now tolerated only on account of his great age—growing rapidly greater every time he told it, which was very frequently—and his bygone record of past services. Though the new vicar had fought for his retention vigorously on these claims at a famous vestry meeting he was not at all grateful, far from it. He considered that quality childish. He also considered the vicar childish, and very constantly alluded to "boys" in small and trenchant conversations thrust into odd moments: he even so designated a famous bishop of only sixty years, so that his meaning was sadly too plain.

He shot his keen little eyes in and out amongst the quiet crowd, as though looking for some one. To him the pungent

odour of extinguished wax candles in a hot and stifling atmosphere, the last few bars of "Handel's Largo," and the sound of clamped heels striking coldly on stone, were sensations familiar and delightful, in that they represented church over for the day; and it was not that he was irreligious—who will dare to say so, seeing the years that he had done his part to the very best of his lights?—but that, like all good workmen, including the "Village Blacksmith," the end of a solid day's duties successfully performed gave him a sense of grunting satisfaction. He hardly needed the "night's repose" of the poem, however, having managed a large slice of that during the sermon. He was only honestly glad that the final service was finished, and expressed this feeling by waving a bunch of keys noisily and thumbing a verdi-gris encoated extinguisher in a manner suggestive of business.

Mary was sitting by a pillar, a little to the side. There was a tired-looking man in the pew in front of her, thin-faced and pale, with black clothes having the appearance of being preserved and worn with great care; he too was lingering as long as he could in the warmth and quiet, with the last sensation of the music lingering in his ear. He might be a poor clerk, or ill-paid shop-assistant. Mary's eyes travelled to him kindly, as she felt in herself the inward troubles of his life, without so much as knowing them; they were one in the free-masonry of the great Poor Man of Galilee.

The vergers stopped by Mary's seat and glanced at her with an eye of shrewdly stern scrutiny.

"If you're Mrs. Fresne," he croaked in a tone he called a whisper, but which, by its very creaking qualities was much louder than an ordinary speaking voice, "the vicar would like to speak to you?"

She got up at his beckoning and followed him.

She found the vestry empty save for the few church servants, busy putting away the various paraphernalia of a Sunday's services; the choir had gone, and the fire in the grate was low and ashy. The vergers knocked with the head of his staff on the door of the inner vestry or sacristy, and Mary was admitted at once. She found Cartyn standing by the mantelpiece; he at once came towards her, apologising for venturing to send for

her, his usually pale face flushed and emotional, and animated by an expression of strange intensity.

Cartyn was suffering from an attack of real penitence. In his passionate outcry against Florence's misunderstanding of him he had rashly included Mary, who was only sinned against, not sinning.

Having decided henceforth to adopt a priestly aloofness from all feminine troubles, he was now conscious of the injustice of including her in his sweeping definition of all things un-churchly, *i. e.* "the world. She had done nothing to deserve it. Indeed, her method of snubbing him at the Crafts Guild had had salutary effect. He felt its lash, yet half resented it. She found him, therefore, remotely attired in a cassock and sash, trying to look severe and indifferent, but rather too bright about the eyes for his part.

"Do come in," he said, in those faintly sing-song accents he had always used when dealing with the unregenerate in a patient manner. "I felt it my duty to tell you that I saw Mrs. Courtman last week."

Mary's eyelids flickered.

"Did you?" she said.

She seemed enigmatical for a worldling, so he went on.

"Do sit down. You recollect what I said to you in the cab, Mrs. Fresne?"

She nodded.

"You did not like my saying what I did. And I still adhere to it. Will you—shall I be considered interfering if I ask what you have done about the matter?"

"Done? Nothing, of course."

"But why of course?"

"I mean I have done nothing because I have heard nothing."

"Didn't Mrs. Courtman write to you, then?"

"No. But I did not really expect it. That sort of thing takes time. Why?"

"Why?" He looked at her from where he stood by the vestry table. "Didn't you know? She has gone abroad."

"Has she? No, I didn't know. But she travels about a great deal. That makes no difference. However, since you have been so kind as to write to me and take a real interest in my affairs, I may as well tell you that on thinking the matter over,

I do not think I shall take any—anything from her now, even if she offers it.” Her face flushed slowly. “I know you thought me wanting in pride,” she added, “even to consider the idea: but you know in India we were once quite dear friends. Very dear friends can do these things.”

“Hush, hush, please!” he said. “I never thought that. My reason was one that I cannot explain to you.”

Though he still stood under the ugly gasjet in his cassock and sash, he had already forgotten the sing-songy voice. She was too wonderful when she went that colour right to her neck, like a dawn-coloured begonia. She made you forget resolves of all sorts.

“Well,” she said, rising, “there’s nothing more to say,” perhaps a little disappointed after the elation of getting a note from him, and after looking forward to this interview. He seemed so dry and official and remote after all. “If she has gone away she has probably forgotten all about it, and me. She leads a very busy life. I am only sorry, now, that I was so taken by surprise by her suggestion, and even at her manner, that I may have seemed to have jumped at her offer. I suppose paupers mustn’t be proud! But I do wish, now, that I had refused it outright.”

Again he was confronted with the difficulty of explaining.

“You didn’t jump,” he said eagerly. “And I am sure you need not blame yourself. I assure you I speak truly. She is a capricious lady and full of impulses; but of one thing I am certain—I know—she did not do anything in idle patronage. I do know that.”

“It would not be like her, certainly. She was not given to that sort of thing in the old days. She was, as you say, always impulsive and full of headstrong freaks, but she was too—too go-ahead, somehow, to do anything so paltry as to play upon my reduced fortunes for the mere value of patronising. No, I exonerate her from any base intention whatsoever—she is a busy, rushing, run-after society woman. The probable explanation is she has not time.”

His anger rose at the spectacle of her kind defence of her friend, her friend whom she “exonerated from any base intention,” whilst that friend treated her most basely! Yet his lips were sealed. But if so his heart went out all the more towards

her in her undeserved adversity, so free from complaining or selfish posing. She seemed to take her position as naturally and as beautifully as though it were not an ignoble one, but something dignified and great.

Just then the verger came tapping at the vestry door, three or four loud determined "raps." "Boys" require constant and sharp overseeing. Cartyn opened the door. "Mrs. Holden to see you, sir," said the verger, looking in at Mary past Cartyn's shoulder, not with authority but merely admonishing regard, as if to say, "For goodness' sake, young woman, take yourself off, do! It's time I got home to my supper and my *Referee*."

"Ask her to wait one moment," said the vicar.

"No," Mary interposed; "I'm going now. Thanks ever so, Mr. Cartyn. We have had a nice talk, and I promise you I won't think of my old friend's caprices again."

She held out her hand and he took it, his heart in his eyes. Then he released it and showed her to the outer vestry, where now the fire had sunk to depressing white ashes. In the middle of the room, by the mahogany table stood the lady of the Crafts Guild and "cultchah" fame, accompanied by her distinctly troubled-looking fat and white and heavy husband.

"Ah, Mr. Cartyn," cried the lady, in a tone of one welcoming another at least from drowning, and exuberant with relief. "Just a moment—about the Girls' Club. May I?"

She did not, however, wait to see if she might, but turned on Mary, who was passing out, a glare worthy of a modern English tragedian doing something Roman. She did it very well. She only needed a toga. Still her toque of Parma violets and her brown frock and sables did not in the least detract from her generally annihilating effect. One could still conceive the burning city at her feet.

Mary, not apparently scorched, glanced up and made a hesitating movement to bow. She knew the matron quite well, but had fully gathered that she was prickly with hostility of a hidden sort. Mary was too well-bred to act a supposed ignorance of her personality, and so avoid a snub. But the lady met her soft attempt not only with the glare, but with a lorgnette in addition, a piece of final vulgarity that even Mary, used to Hoydenisms resented. She turned away proudly, and saying "good-

night" again to Cartyn, went to the door which he held open for her. The lorgnette followed them. Cartyn came back.

"Oh, just a word, please," said Mrs. Holden suddenly, far too suddenly, developing from extreme hauteur a grin worthy of a hyena or the Cheshire cat. This violent facial change struck a chill through Cartyn's whole being, as usually happens to an honest man in the circumstances, but he courteously inquired her wants. "Oh, about the club .Ethel says," went on Mrs. Holden, pushing, or rather edging her bald and perfectly quiet husband to one side, "dear Ethel says, won't you just run down and speak to them again one evening this week? She says they *do* so want to hear you—they do so love your addresses. Ethel has got three new members! Such a devoted girl, Mr. Cartyn, though I am her mother! The dear child's whole heart is in this club—won't you come?"

The vicar, not yearning to be engulfed in Miss Holden's heart, was still polite and considerate.

"I will try—not this week, but next," he said. "This week, I fear, is quite full up. If Miss Holden will be so good as to let me off for this week and put me down for the first day in the week after, I can arrange it."

Mr. Holden, bald, stout, stolid, and rather bored-looking, now nodded kindly, as if immensely relieved.

"Thanks, thanks," he said. "I am sure you're a very busy man, and don't want us here at this time of night. We'll be off."

"Mr. Cartyn has plenty of visitors at this time of night," said Mrs. Holden, with pointed emphasis.

Cartyn said kindly, "I'm always glad to see my friends."

"Was that one of them—that young person who went out just now?" said Mrs. Holden, sarcastically gushing. "I really hope not, Mr. Cartyn?"

"I am happy to say—yes," said he, in the quiet tone that boded nobody any good, so often mistaken by his foes for weak surrender. Mrs. Holden, armed with lorgnette and impudence, was just the sort of foe to mistake all courtesy for yielding. The trait belongs to the truculent but poor-witted.

"Then, my dear vicar—*may* a mother speak?" said she. Cartyn reflected that they generally do, asked or not, if of Mrs. Holden's order. He therefore looked sternly inquiring but said

nothing. So the mother spoke, with a short glare cast over her shoulder at the stolid husband, as a warning to pretend he wasn't listening—to look more stolid than even Nature had made him, in fact.

"The mother of girls—dear girls, Mr. Cartyn—must say a little *teeny* word of warning to—may I put it so?—a young man like yourself. That young person has a strange name in the parish—now, now, *don't* be angry. I really know nothing against her. I only say there are rumours afloat. Her very singular appearance may quite account for it. Shall we say no more? I leave it to your good feeling to credit me with the very best of motives."

The task set to Cartyn's good feeling was a heavy one. It was perhaps more than his could bear; at any rate, the description of modest Mary as "singular"—after all, in certain circles that may quite honestly be one name for beauty!—finished his stock of the commodity.

"You speak, very naturally, from hearsay," he said. "But I take this opportunity of mentioning that I know this lady's entire history, a sad one; and one at least of her friends and contemporaries I also know, a lady of high position. I may honestly say that any parish gossip you have been listening to is unfounded."

Mrs. Holden did not like the term "parish gossip." She bridled and said, "Well, dear Mr. Cartyn, all I can say is the opinion of the parish is at least worth considering."

"When it comes to me in deputation I will certainly grant it that courtesy," replied the vicar, with gravity. Mr. Holden, forgetting to be as stolid as he ought, laughed out suddenly, in rather spasmodic, detached giggles, his little eyes twinkling.

"We're not that," he said. "Come on, Emily, my dear, come on. Good-night, vicar. The ladies will talk, won't they? But, like you, I know a pretty girl when I see one!"

With this entirely unexpected flash of conjugal defiance Mr. Holden was hustled out of the vestry by his wife who bowed "good-night" to the vicar, with the glare raging in her eye, while the grin, its opposite, held riot in her mouth and the creases in her cheeks.

The verger, entering with painful promptness directly the outer door shut upon them, jerked his thumb in their direction,

while with the other hand he unfastened his Geneva gown preparatory to going home for the night.

"A tongue she's got, and an eye, sir," he said. "My eye, what an eye! Saw Mrs. Fresne come in here, she did, and trumped up a tale to come in too! Oh I see it! They don't get over me. I saw her sittin' on and on in her pew with her pore old man—pore thing!—long after I'd packed the rest of 'em hout. She says to me, 'You won't send *us* out, Tolley, will you?' she says, with that yard-wide smile of hers. 'Well,' I says, 'I've got to bundle 'em off a bit; if I didn't I should have 'em praying all over the place. You and Mr. Holden is different,' I said, thoughtful like. 'I suppose churchwardens *do* pray sometimes. But I'm not afraid of you doin' it, nor yet stealing the church hornaments.' That shut her up; then she come in here."

Cartyn shook his head despairingly and smiled. Tolley was incurable, and quite beyond his rebukes. He bade the old man a kind good-night, and went out at last into the starlit streets, where still the Sunday sweethearts were pacing along the streets, their semi-shuffling feet making a constant and monotonous sound on the still warm night air. It was early May, and as warm as midsummer. He turned aside from the vicarage; in that bachelor abode meals were of a floating order—oh, happy estate!—and out his way through several streets by Lancaster Gate and out into the wider road running parallel with the park. Inside Kensington Gardens the trees loomed a soft black mass against the dim, deep night blue of the clear sky, and the Albert Memorial stood out like a tall card-castle built by a giant baby. The scent of warm spring grass and fresh leaves and all the joyful mysterious things of spring came to him through the iron railings, occasionally spoilt by the odour from a petrol motor or 'bus passing to the right.

Was he doomed to be always caricatured by the parochial Holdens? From originally having to take her part against Mrs. Courtman, he must now take it against his own parish—or abandon her and her trampled cause!

He leant over the bridge that crosses the Serpentine and looked across the dim grey misty water to the lights twinkling in the black trees beyond, like soft yellow stars. Because, for all his self-defences, her eyes had been like two soft grey stars round which the world went dancing, for which his pulses went racing. Which would it be? Love or the parish?

CHAPTER X

"Is it your play, Major?"

"Yes, my dear lady. I'm going ahead." She shuffled his cards, minutely studying them.

"I'm not, I declare! Ill-luck always follows the wicked!"

"Oh, goddesses shouldn't fish, Mrs. Courtman! There, that's my *coup*. Wait—wait—yes, hooray! Hand over the pool. There I'm doing grandly; I told you so."

Mrs. Courtman threw down her cards.

"I'm miserably unlucky," she said. "See what I've lost in this round only. Oh dear. Well, well, Major, I'm glad you're so fortunate. You must have a better conscience than I have! Are you superstitious?"

"Now, what do you mean by that?" said the Major, pocketing his winnings, as their friends moved away chattering, and lighting a cigar—they were playing in the open air. "Am I superstitious? Signs and portents and all that? Oh well, when I hear the postman's knock something mysterious and occult tells me I shall get a bill, eh? And when my heart beats very fast indeed, I know"—he bowed—"I am going to meet a pretty woman!"

"Oh, but I am serious. I mean quite solemnly, you know."

"Bills are solemn," said the Major; "if you have a banking account at all. Otherwise they are a joke, an absurdity. Mine are invariably humorous, I need hardly add."

"I mean, then, have you a conscience?" said Mrs. Courtman.

"Need you ask?" said the Major. "Go to my tailor, dear lady. I have no other spiritual adviser. Have you?"

"What!—a conscience or a spiritual director?" Mrs. Courtman was perfectly grave.

"Either will do," said the Major with equal gravity. "You can choose the one or the other—but I wouldn't be burdened with both."

"Major, you are so deep—I don't understand you?"

"Oh, I hope that makes me deep. What if it should indicate that I am ridiculous?"

"I never quite know whether you are sarcastic or not. I suppose that is why you are popular in society—though that sort of thing would be horrid in a woman, wouldn't it? Men still have a better time than women, for all their freedom and emancipation!"

"Poor souls!" said the Major; "it is hard on them to be driven to extract any glory from being vaguely supposed to be sarcastic! Isn't that the last straw of a defeated wit?"

"*You* know what you mean, dear Major—I don't. No wonder the world calls you clever. Really, you are very witty!"

"Because you don't follow my rubbish? My dear, good, kind Mrs. Courtman, allow me to say you are mistaken—but charmingly so. Come now, tell me why you talked of superstition?"

"Oh, nothing. But I've got an idea that I can't get rid of——"

"Oh, how unfortunate! I got rid of all mine ages ago. Really it pays best."

"Yes, yes. Only unfortunately I am so constituted that ideas simply worry me—at times. You'll say I'm growing old."

"Far from it. It is only the very young who have ideas."

"Not my sort. Major, did you ever do any one an—an injury? And if you did, don't you find consequences following you, dogging you at every turn? Do you think that sort of thing really brings ill-luck?"

"Now we are getting at it at last! No, I don't. The unrighteous seem to flourish like a green bay tree; still—look over there at old Hookham," he indicated a small elderly man, very insignificant, but very elaborately dressed, who was sauntering on a neighbourly lawn; "the amount of people he's helped to ruin by lending his precious title to bogus companies ought to weigh on his spirits a bit, but it doesn't. There isn't a more chirpy old boy in town. He simply bought his barony at a high price, and is now letting it out again at a higher profit. His path is strewn with slain—but, hark, he is humming a song."

"Oh, that is only business. Sins in business don't count. If they did, so many people would have to be cut that there would be nobody left to know, would there? Besides, even Lord Hookham must have moments, Major—moments. In the small hours of the morning now, when his head will not let him rest and his

false teeth are out—it is horrid to think how unpleasantly real you feel without your teeth. It gets at you more than any amount of sermons.”

“The ever-frank,” said the Major, waving his hand towards his companion. “Mrs. Courtman, had you met Socrates you would have out-rivalled him on many philosophical points.”

“Oh well, if you won’t be serious it’s no good, I suppose. But at any rate I refuse to believe that Lord Hookham is happy. Happy men don’t talk to themselves, and walk about quickly like that, and argue with everybody.”

“Still, he’s trying to live. Look at his endless health-cures. He must find life livable?”

“Oh, but that’s the worst sign of all! He doesn’t find life so livable as the next life so utterly unlivable, that he must hold on to this as long as he can. I always suspect a man who eats tabloids and takes rest-cures of a bad conscience.”

“And a woman of a bad complexion?”

“Oh, that you could see for yourself.”

“I deny it. Usually no one ever does see it at all.”

“Well, for my part, I left town because things were all going so badly with me. I lost half my income, very nearly, at bridge in three months, and my doctor died, and my friends all got tiresome. That’s a horrid feeling when all your friends suddenly get tiresome, isn’t it? Mine were awful. I never saw such a set. So I came out here to St. Moritz to get away from them.”

“And yet here is Hookham staying at the same hotel after all! No wonder you are searching for a hidden crime in your past to account for him! It would be a good, rousing crime too, to account for Hookham being sent as a punishment. What was it—forgery, or Free Trade, or bad dinners, or bad debts? It should be interesting.”

“Oh, it was only gossip,” said Mrs. Courtman; “or scandal, if you like to call it so. But I’m certain it is dogging my path; everything goes wrong with me. I can’t tell you the simple sheaf of ill-luck I’ve had lately! I’m in one whirl of bad news and things.”

“I’m so sorry; it must be bad too, for you look quite worried. But there are ways of averting consequences and things, aren’t there? Let’s ask Hookham; he’s been at that dodge all his life, pretty nearly; he must be quite an authority. Hi! Hillo!” he

suddenly hailed the distant gentleman madly. Mrs. Courtman protested in horror.

"Oh, Major! Oh no! Oh dear, how rude we must look! Come along, since you've been so silly—we must go to him and say something! He'll think us horribly ill-bred. I wish I hadn't spoken. How awful of you!"

But the old gentleman in question seemed quite undisturbed, though he certainly turned and looked back at the sound of the the Major's "Hilloo."

They got up and sauntered towards him, Mrs. Courtman wearing one of her sweetest smiles, but showing her annoyance in her shoulders which had an ominous movement. These things did not trouble Lord Hookham, who surveyed the approaching lady with a certain faint curiosity, entirely untinged by admiration, as her tall form, simply and exquisitely gowned, came sailing across the smooth lawn like a fair frigate in full sail.

"Major Fragge was *so* rude!" she cried. "He would hail you, Lord Hookham. It's all about nothing. In fact it was to tell you that he and Mrs. Damer beat me and Sir John at bridge."

"Don't believe her, Hookham," said the Major; "it wasn't. It was to ask you what you would do if you had a bad conscience. I'm only putting a case, of course, of course!"

"What's a conscience?" said the old man, his yellow shrunken face wearing an expression perfectly serious and unmoved, as he looked back at them with his heavy-lidded, lack-lustre eyes—his eyelids were the only marked features in his face. He stood still, his little thin arms akimbo to his narrow body.

"Oh well——" began the Major.

"Do you mean a liver?" went on the imp-faced, but perfectly solemn personage before them.

"Or acid in the system—probably?"

"They do go very sour often, certainly," said the Major.

"Or hysterical gout? Or a neuralgic heart, or so forth? There are lots of names for these things, and they take many forms," continued Hookham gravely, in a thin and singularly unemotional voice, rather faint in sound, like some one speaking monotonously through the lid of a closed box; "but people show no common sense, no common sense, in the way they treat them. Now I have a régime of infallible curing properties. Look at me—

seventy-two—yet I've the figure of a boy—look no more than fifty and feel younger than I did at twenty."

"Oh well, one grows out of it," said the Major.

"What?"

"Conscience."

"I object to the absurd names you call things."

"Well, do prescribe for Mrs. Courtman; she's got it, anyhow. Suppose we call it neuralgic acid in her case—she scolds me for not taking her seriously."

"Is that one of the symptoms?" said Hookman, turning his solemn, lugubrious eyes on to Florence with a faint hint of interest for the first time. All her sumptuous beauty and fascination of bearing, the sheer fascination of perfect gowns and perfect ease, had not appealed to him in the least, though several people, well used to smartly turned out women, had turned to look at her as she passed, as a singularly handsome example of her class; and in addition to this there was certainly something half-appealing and interesting in her extreme candour of manner and darkly lashed, rather stupid eyes, which men called innocent because they contained no hint of humour. Indeed, poor Florence had none whatever; but that hardly made her innocent. But Hookham saw nothing of these things, nor the flecked sunlight on her full white neck, nor the pathos of her attitude; all he did see was some one with a possible disease, especially a modern and unexplainable one, and this at once attracted his manly regard. Such things were his hobby—his delight.

"Have you tried walking in the May dew with no shoes and stockings on?" he said, regarding her profoundly.

"Oh no—oh dear!" said she. "Is that really recommended?"

"I do it myself every morning before breakfast," said Hookman. "I am a standing example of its efficacy."

"But it isn't May—it's June," said Florence. "Must I wait a year?"

Hookham waved an impatient hand. "Do you suppose modern science is dependent on seasons?" he said. "Mere seasons! Cans of concentrated essence of May dew may be procured direct from an American firm with whom I am in communication—Messrs. Perks & Jerks, of 559 Ninety-Second Avenue, New York. You get it in the form of small crystals or globules, and it should be

sprinkled on wet grass before you walk across it. Any servant with sense can do it for you."

"I think I'll get my servant to do the walking too, while I'm about it," said Florence.

"No," said Hookham, with perfect equanimity. "You must really do that yourself. That is indispensable. I can see you are in a very precarious state and need some immediate cure."

"Can you?" said Florence, her face paling. "Oh, but how?—why?—what——?"

"You will pardon me," continued Hookham; "but I feel sure I observed you at the hotel going straight through the ordinary menu. Let me warn you against menus! They are sheer murder. My dear lady, a little raw barley scattered by hand into a tumbler of Apollinaris water once or twice a day would do more for your case than all the food or doctor's stuff in the world! Look at me!"

They did look at him, and Florence shivered.

"I wish I'd brought a magnifying glass," said the Major regretfully.

"I take practically no food except a kind of wonderfully stimulating sawdust called 'Samson Agonistes'" continued the little lord of finance reflectively, his lizard-lidded eyes still resting thoughtfully on the healthy, Juno-built form of Florence as she stood at attention before him. "It has most remarkable properties. A single pinch of it will nourish the entire nervous system for the space of twenty-four hours. My table d'hôte is white of egg, sparingly used, with a pinch of cocoa-nut fibre, chemically prepared, stirred up in it. Cocoa-nut fibre is the new fibre builder, a most important and marvellous discovery. I would beg you to avoid meat, milk, wine, vegetables, fruit, tea, or sweets—they will tend to the production of poisons in the nerves, a fatal result. Look at all these people?" he waved his little, cold, dry, yellow hand towards several groups of happy looking souls enjoying the music, the sunshine, and each other's company in a manner innocent and healthy enough. "They are all examples of poisoned systems. They are choked by bacteria, by improper food, by every excess, by every possible dietary folly! They are doomed men and doomed women! As I walk about here—I do it for three hours out of every day on principle, and, as you may have observed plant my feet in a special manner as I walk suited

to the exact poise of the liver and nerve-centres—I look over at them—the fools!—and see what the world is coming to by its own stupidity. Really, who wonders at the disease and sudden death all about us? Don't they deserve it?"

He stood, with his waxen face and mean bleached head, his shrunken form, his abnormal eyelids protruding over his dull eyes, his thin blue lips, and his toneless voice, and looked down upon a world of sunny pleasure-makers from a height of perfect self-confidence and self-congratulation. Never mind that the others were brown-cheeked, bright-eyed, merry, natural; that was nothing. He, placing his feet as he walked for the special poise of his nerve-centers, was their superior. He, a cold corpse, still faintly living, and crawling about unstirred by the warm sun of France, having no pulses to stir, found himself infinitely better than these, who, with all their follies seemed children of the gods, children of nature, laughter, and love.

The Major laughed.

"Well, thanks, we'll try all of it," he said, and drew Mrs. Courtman away, not before she was entirely glad to go.

"Horrible little reptile," she said. "Does he live for his wretched health-cures?"

"He does now," said the Major. "He used to live to get hold of other people's money. Now he's got that he's trying to get their health—that he'll never do."

"But has he really done such very—very abnormal things in finance? You know what things *are* done, and nobody bothers."

"He's ruined thousands. And he's made a big pile for himself. He can't really count his possessions. I wish him joy of them! White of egg and cocoanut fibre seems a poor goal to have lost your soul for!"

"The question is, has he? Why shouldn't he get rich, after all, if he is smart enough? You would, Major, if you could. So would any of us."

"Oh, rather; but I shouldn't care to have it built on lies, that's all. Nothing can live on a lie."

Florence shook herself impatiently, and said, "Oh, for goodness' sake, don't let us get serious any more. That poor old man has depressed me altogether! Let us go and find the others and see if we can't get them to come and something interesting."

The Major laughed. "Well, Hookham has cured you of your conscience fit," he said. "I told you he would!"

But though Florence found her hosts and friends ready enough to join with her in plenty of gay expeditions, some of them almost escapades, she could not altogether forget the interview with the old man who had learnt to kill his inner self, much less could she rid herself of Major Fragge's light words, "Nothing can live on a lie." He had said them so carelessly, as carelessly as we utter a passing commonplace, because, to him possibly, they were almost a commonplace, as are all vital truths to the just-living. It was just because he said them in that off-hand way, as a proved and tried experience of life now dismissed as settled, that they fixed themselves in Florence's uneasy mind, and worried her whenever the gay scenes into which she plunged momentarily bored her, as all gay scenes have a strange way of doing for most of us, in spite of their supposed fascination.

After all, in spite of his banter and nonsense, that was Major Fragge's answer to her worried question, whether intentional or not. Probably he hardly realised how well his words had applied to her case, for he was obviously thinking of Hookham's, but he had unconsciously confirmed her in her wretched suspicions as to the ill-fortune attendant on her evil deed, and so far from cheering her had added final weight to her burden. "Nothing can live on a lie." She heard it in the music that night, when they went to the opera, and it seemed to point to her again when some one said carelessly, "You're not looking so well, Mrs. Courtman. Are you feeling played out?" It seemed the natural reply to the question.

It seemed as though living on a lie accounted for the black dragged-looking marks under her eyes that sometimes annoyed her when she looked in the glass. And when she heard a girl's bright laugh, or saw some one dance very lightly, or heard some one singing over daily things, she suffered a grim contraction of her heart, knowing that these things were beyond her, and attributing the whole trouble to that lie. Whether she was right is a matter of opinion. Either she had too much heart or too little sense of humour for a schemer. In any case she was feverish, cross, and disappointed.

She was used to men who were at least indulgent to her, even for follies—a pretty and rich widow with social tastes would be

likely to find much indulgence—and she had quite expected Cartyn, the celebrated young vicar of a fashionable church, to meet her confession with the same spirit, possibly glossed over, she admitted, by a little picturesque ecclesiastical local colour, but in essence very much the same gentle humouring that she would have got from Major Fragge or any other of her semi-cavaliers. That sudden attitude of hardness and inflexibility on Cartyn's part had annoyed her, and she had shown temper at it; nevertheless she had hoped in course of time to break it down. But the discovery of his personal interest in Mary, and the rapid and correct conclusion to which she had leapt that he was in love with her, had roused into life all the smouldering selfishness of her nature, and flung her into a similar passion as the one that had been the cause of her original cruelty to Marcus Fresne's wife. She had impulsively written, then, to friends about to fly to St. Moritz, and had gone off with them in the middle of the London season, in a temper of mind only to be compared to a furious shaking of the dust of all seriousness off her feet.

Had forgetfulness come with this move, all would have been well, and she would shortly have evolved a philosophy that might have carried her out of Cartyn's ken altogether, but her whirligig of gaieties had been interrupted by bad news from England; a mere matter of property failing to realise expected returns, money loss, and law trouble, enough to set her weather cock brain on its old questions of the ill-luck of evil-doing. Again, so pathetically absurd are the superstitious, a letter telling of the marriage of one of her quasi-admirers was counted by her in the same category of malignant mischance, though these nuptials were not wholly unexpected, and she was far from caring in the least for the selfish, foppish, and dellderly bridegroom.

So much had this Nemesis idea become an obsession that she actually placed to its credit the loss of a topaz necklace, the difficulties over an extravagant costume, a passing remark of a woman friend that she was growing stouter, a trifling motor accident, indigestion and "crows' feet."

Certainly it was a catholic-minded Nemesis! Out of all these troubles possibly the crows' feet and strained eyes might be put down to its credit—an unhappy temper would do that for most people—but to her it was answerable for all things evil.

In such a manner the days passed on, gaiety after gaiety thoroughly entered into, and just at odd moments that ghost of her own grim making clutching at her and destroying her good humour and comfort. Poor Florence! She really was unhappy, and in her own confused, feverish, passionate way quite as hungry after something that evaded her as a starving man is hungry—so much so that she had to fill up every moment of her days to prevent the gnawing trouble of serious thinking.

One forenoon her host, Sir John Hailey, looked up as she came out and joined him in the hotel courtyard, saying, "Have you heard about poor old Hookham? I thought it would happen."

"What—what has happened?"

"Oh, he's taken desperately ill. They've got all the swellest men in the medical profession out here consulting up there over the poor old boy," he waved his hand to a high white stone wing of the great hotel. "That's his suite of apartments. He's pretty bad, for they're sending over to England for Welcome to consult."

The name was one of a great surgeon of royal renown.

"But I thought he didn't believe in doctors?" said Florence. "He has so many health crazes of his own."

"Oh, he's past all that rubbish now, poor old chap. It's a case of touch and go. There's got to be an operation."

"An operation? Good heavens, what for?"

"Cancer—malignant. I believe he's very far gone. They say he may be saved, but it's a mere chance."

Florence glanced up again at the wing of the great building, showing dazzling white like marble against the deep, palpitating blue of the morning sky. The Doric pillars on one of the balconies were gay with white pigeons fluttering cheerily in and out, a whirl of winged life, and some scarlet geraniums in green tubs flamed along the terraces and into the shady courtyard where she and Sir John were sitting. The strains of a distant band floated to them from the neighbouring gardens playing 'Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." And yet here, over all this, hung the black shadow of death, an awful sudden visitor looming like a great folding cloud over that room and that wretched old man.

"How horrible and sudden!" said she.

"Sudden! Oh no, surely not, he's seventy-two. Lived his life

too, he has. Poor old boy, he's got one or two things to answer for, I should fancy, though. I know two poor wretches he ruined."

"But he seemed so well."

"Oh, yes, he thought so. But——" Sir John shrugged his shoulders meaning nothing particular, but Florence's quick mind supplied the sentence's conclusion in her own way, "nothing can live on a lie!"

As the day wore on the others went about their usual excursions and amusements and forgot the tragedy in the west wing. The pigeons flew in and out of the Greek pillars; the band continued to play; the hotel folk, with the traditions of their kind, were conveniently ignorant if plied with questions—a cancer operation in a hotel is not good for business, and Florence could discover very little. Suave and smiling officials, if badgered, seemed to become suddenly ignorant, not only of English and German, but of their own language also. Even the language of tips seemed to have grown obscure to them.

She wandered about restlessly, trying to attach herself to this amusement and that. In the evening, however, when the table d'hôte assembled, and the crowds at the different tables chattered away amongst the lights and glass and flowers, she noticed that for once the band was not playing. She turned swiftly to Sir John, "There is no band to-night. Is it on account of——?"

"Why, yes. They don't want it talked about, though."

"Is he worse?"

Lady Hailey looked up at her guest in surprise.

"Worse, my dear? He's dead. Didn't you know?"

"Dead?"

"Yes," said Lady Hailey, helping herself to an olive. "It's awfully sad. Do try one of these—they're Italian."

But Major Fragge, seeing Florence's white face, said, "Mrs. Courtman didn't know. I think we shouldn't have told her. Only last week the poor old boy was telling her how to get rid of a conscience. After all, he wasn't so bad."

Florence got up. "I'm not feeling very well," she said. "I'll just slip outside on the balcony. No, no, don't come, any of you. It's only fresh air I want."

She slipped out on to one of the balconies, and looked into the still and starry night.

"I'm morbid," she said. "This sort of thing is utter folly. That poor old man's case and mine have nothing in common—nothing. As a matter of fact, I am overstraining things quite absurdly by letting such a trifle trouble me at all. Clergymen have nothing to do but think of little things like this. They make mountains out of molehills. I wish I'd never seen Mr. Cartyn—or her. It's spoiling my temper."

A fluttering sound above her head caused her to glance up suddenly towards the high-columned wing, now grey and misty in the clear starlight, where the dead man lay. From under the dark portico where at noontide the pigeons had disported, a bird suddenly flew out into the black night on hurried hasty wings. As it emerged from the shadow she saw that it was not a pigeon—its plumage was perfectly black. Whatever it was—kite or owl, or perhaps no bird at all but a large bat—it filled her with sudden horror. She turned again towards the pink lights.

"Ugh! The lie that killed him!" she shuddered. "I shall have to leave this hateful place to-morrow! It's full of death and omens!"

CHAPTER XI

"COME in, Mr. Renel," said the vicar from his study table. "Yes, yes. I had a question to ask about your guild. What is it that I hear—that they have asked one of the members to resign?"

"Yes, yes, most truly," said Mr. Renel, or rather he chanted it, monotoned it on "A." He was the tall, thin, fair young man who had conquered the Manxman at the rectory meeting by the play of his finger-tips. He was immaculately clean, with an upper lip that hooked up in the middle over his front teeth, and an air of much detachment, and he carried his head slightly poked forward and on one side, with his eyes half-shut.

"But why? What happened?" The vicar's voice was more urgent than usual. It sounded almost angry.

"My dear vicar, I cannot say."

"But you are president?"

"No, no. Only the secretary. The committee settled this affair."

"But with your sanction?"

"Oh yes, yes, certainly. Even so," added Mr. Renel, as an afterthought. Newman at Oxford was his model, though possibly that great man would hardly have recognised the portrait had it been presented to him.

"But what reason was given? Surely you do not let your committee do these—these odd things at will? What was the reason?"

"The lady did needlework—yes, yes—drawn linen for altar use, if I recollect rightly. She had not much time, I believe; she got the work in on Saturdays, she said. But the lady who is head of the needlework section complained that the work was not done quickly enough; there was difficulty and, I imagine, recrimination. I had no voice. The lady at the head of the needlework section has full control over her workers."

"Who is the lady at the head of the needlework section?" said Cartyn sternly, in spite of himself.

"Mrs. Holden," replied Renel, still abstracted and far away from such wordly discussions.

"Mrs. Holden? I see," said the vicar. His voice would have shaken with indignation if he had spoken again for a moment, so hot his wrath rose within him.

"So the young lady was asked to resign," went on Renel, chanting his monotonous sing-song in perfect contentment. "She was a lady—well—never quite of our kind," he added. "My recollection of her is—though I never notice these things myself—but I was told that she had remarkable personal advantages. I was told so. Women are to me as a sealed book. But——"

"They didn't keep very sealed over this!" burst out Cartyn, his blue eyes flashing suddenly. "They seem to have been unusually ready-tongued and precipitate in ejecting this lady, from all I can hear." He could not, for the life of him, help his indignation at her treatment, though it was not wholly wise of him to show it.

"Well, well, my dear vicar," said the saintly Renel peaceably "she did not mind at all. I do not think she was happy there. Our work was too serious for her frivolous mind——"

"Frivolous? What do you mean? Who said she was frivolous?"

Renel lifted the lightly tipped and graceful hand remonstratingly.

"Are not all beautiful women so?" he asked, his eyes on a fly on Cartyn's ceiling. "I am told that is so. Beauty is a snare, and of the world."

"I suppose jealousy isn't a snare and of the world?" snapped Cartyn. "Or vulgar prejudice? Or injustice? Those are Christian qualities. That will quite do; many thanks, Mr. Renel. I will see Mrs. Holden, but of course I shall not interfere in the minor arrangements of your guild. Only I wouldn't," he added maliciously, "make a public announcement to the effect that all persons with—what d'ye call it?—'personal advantages' will be violently ejected. You might harm your chances of further feminine members. You might even lose Mrs. Holden herself if you made that clear enough! Most women would rather be expelled on those terms than kept on any others!"

He turned on his heel. He knew the whole sickening story underlying this trifling evasion. Renel, possibly, knew nothing

of it whatever. He was far too much wrapped in his beloved church ornaments and the zeal of his guild to lend an ear to a scandal, even if he were not, it must be admitted, too much of a gentleman to do so. A tendency to uncharitableness or slander was not among his faults, and his committee had known him too well to repeat any such to him. He would have been quite capable, in such a case, of rising up and taking Mary's side against them, as theoretically, and sometimes even in practice, he upheld the downtrodden. But his deepest beliefs were involved in the idea that all remarkably pretty women were of no use, if not even worse; and that they were utterly foreign to all serious ecclesiastical work was with him a creed that no sane organiser could dispute. It has been said that he could get his theory of human nature on to his own thumbnail, and it will therefore be understood that he had only room for two types of women—those who were good and those who were pretty. So he had let Mary go, as one lets a captive butterfly out again into its own careless sunshine, with no ill-feeling or deliberate unkindness. After all, he was "detached," and that estate absolves you from studying the inner motives of committees, together with many other unpleasant duties, besides providing a halo on easy terms.

Cartyn let him go without further argument. He himself had no right to defend Mary openly, and his doing so at this juncture might do her infinitely more harm than good. After any collision with the knot of exceedingly fussy persons who presided over guild affairs, it's quite certain she would not care to return, even if he forced Renel and ask Mrs. Holden to retract their unjust decision and ask her to do so.

Since that night of starlight on the Serpentine he had not ceased to dream hotly at the alternative choice that faced him—Mary or the parish. That she was intrinsically inimical to the parish he never doubted. This sort of interview with Renel confirmed him in this belief. She was not cut out for a typical clergyman's wife, he said.

"They always marry 'helpmeets,'" he reflected. "Those are ladies in drab felt hats. They are very useful. One is expected to marry that sort of lady. They have mackintoshes, and they ride bicycles. They work meetings very successfully. She does not dress smartly—she can't afford it, poor girl!—but somehow, she isn't what everybody would expect me to marry. I couldn't

call her a helpmeet!" He sighed, and added, "She is much too pretty."

He was walking across the park at the time, in the Kensington direction. He had been to a meeting, politico-clerical, in the wilds of Marylebone. It had been for and against a recent Bill before Parliament—the chairman and a small scratch following very much "for," and the meeting "against," to the point of dancing. He had enthusiastically taken his part against the measure. He felt that he must get some fresh air. He was very proud of himself, because he had not seen Mary for nearly three weeks. To a mind submerged in such a groove as his, a picturesque triumph over self and its desires is a far finer attainment than a common kindness. Honestly he had kept away from the fascination of her presence, truly believing that by so doing he was "testing" himself and his principles. Her point of view had come second to his own moral victory. Brother Anselm would have applauded this fine discarding of the troubling sex, although himself followed in season and out of season by Miss Yearsley and Miss Limpole. Strong in his colleague's good opinion, a matter which, united with his own moral vanity, he called his conscience, he cheerfully made his way home across the park, with the scent of dust and crushed grass in his nostrils, and the sight of little children and old men sailing toy yachts on the round pond vaguely before his eyes.

He had passed the Albert Memorial, and was walking out of the park to cross into Queen's Gate, when a figure approaching along the pathway leading from Knightsbridge Barracks by the side of the Row arrested his attention. He glanced back and half paused in his walk. The figure came nearer, and a group of people between them moved aside, and then he caught the face in full—it was Mary! The blood rushed to his face, and without a moment's hesitation he went eagerly towards her, all his love glowing in his eyes. Her face was white, her step slow, and her whole air flagging and weary, as though the heat oppressed her. And what was she doing here at this time of day? Her usual hours were so late.

He simply went up to her and took both her hands in his.

"Oh, to think of meeting you here!" he said, his voice real for once.

She looked up and smiled faintly, but as gladly as he.

"Why, yes!" she said. "And you!"

"How is it? Have you left early?"

Mary left her hands in his and but dropped her eyes, and her head dropped a little forward.

"I've left altogether," she said. "I've been asked to resign."

"You've left the Hoydens? Well, but isn't it rather sudden?"

"Yes. In a way—of course it's sudden. But I suppose I have had my suspicions—fears, that it would take place for some little time.

She spoke in a tone of undisguised weariness. Her feet dragged as she walked, as though she were utterly tired out, and to Cartyn's shocked eyes her working attire in the cruel light of broad day looked absolutely shabby. He hardly liked to admit it to himself, but she seemed already to have acquired the dreary outward signs of desperate poverty; her coat and skirt were shrunk with many winter wettings and, though neat in fit, looked worn; her gloves, once a serviceable tan kid, were tawny with many fine old shades, dark browns and greens and blacks, worthy of Velasquez, no doubt, but out of place on a tan glove. She carried a little leather bag, containing her purse and handkerchief, and this, too, was worn shabby, and the imitation silver metal on its clasps was long since dulled to a deadened grey tint, while her boots, though neat in a sense, had gone whitish through long hard wear, and showed up terribly on the bright fair gravel flecked with sunbeams. For the moment, Cartyn, in Mary's name, detested the sun that brought its heartless pranks to bear so unfeelingly on to this pathetic record of a winter's hard struggles. Gold, glaring, laughing, dancing behind the long green stretches of park trees, he seemed a vulgar god, making game of the bitter wrecks his equally cruel friends the winter storms had tossed up on this bright strand. Added to all this her lips were white, and loose strands of her hair, which she seemed too tired to make orderly, were blowing about her weary face, fanned by coy zephyrs whirling up suddenly from the dusty ground.

He walked along for a moment by her side, not knowing clearly what to do. The Row was still full of carriages and electric motors, though the season was nearly over, and its flash of gay colours and laughing faces was a strange contrast to this wan-faced, sorrowful figure. People they met on the footpath stared at them a little, and in the rather thick crowd Cartyn had to

acknowledge bows from two groups of rich and well-known people belonging to his own congregation, and these were certainly most openly curious as to his companion, with the frank ill-breeding of the would-be great.

"You were going home?" he said, suddenly fired by an inspiration born of secret wrath at these encounters.

"Yes."

"Come with me—somewhere. We'll decide where later. Come along." He spoke eagerly and sharply. She was dazed and tired, and he had hastily signalled to a crawling hansom outside the park railings, and, before she quite realised his intention, had put her into it, and they were bowling along Kensington Gore in the western direction.

She sank back in the stuffy dark blue cushions, glad, at any rate, of the rest and the respite from the ever-shifting kaleidoscopic crowds out on pleasure and show. She glanced at Cartyn's face, set sideways to her, and saw that it was paler and graver than usual, with the thin lips set in a sterner line.

She felt she must rouse herself and cast off her sense of shock and depression that was weighing her down for his sake, and so, getting a brilliant, if conventional, idea from some placards still outside the Albert Hall, she asked him all about the education meeting, and its result. He told her, briefly and clearly, most of what had occurred, and gave outlines of the better speeches, but his manner was absorbed and preoccupied, and she could see that he had many other thoughts for the moment. By Kensington Church he stopped the driver, and said, suddenly interrupting her own speech—

"Let us go and have dinner—or something. Then we can really talk."

She would have demurred, but he added, "I'm hungry. I don't know if you are—but I've had an hour and a half at a hot meeting, and hardly any lunch. Besides, it's such a little I see of you: Come, it's quiet here." They had turned into Church Lane, and he had alighted before the door of a little French restaurant with mahogany and latticed window-fittings, and, wearied out, she had no choice but to go in with him.

It was a small and quiet place inside, flamboyantly decorated, but very comfortable, and happily it was empty, the hour being much too early for its usual dining custom. So they got a little

table to themselves at the far end—the restaurant was funnel-shaped, like a twopenny tube—and a simple meal was ordered. Cartyn waited for it with apparent indifference, in spite of his assertion that he was hungry, playing abstractedly with the Britannia metal topped mustard pot, and not glancing at his companion as he said suddenly and curtly, “Now tell me—why have you left the club?”

Mary was pulling off the Velasquez-shaded gloves. Her voice came falteringly.

“There was a quarrel—amongst the committee. There always has been a sort of—of feud,” she said. “It got worse and worse each day, and to-day it culminated in my dismissal.”

“Yes, but even for the sake of bitter feeling people cannot cancel engagements without some excuse,” he persisted. The slow blood mounted to Mary’s tired face.

“Then one was easy to find—in my case,” she said, almost inaudibly.

“What do you mean? They can know nothing about you—or that——” He paused.

“They do,” said Mary. “They have heard something. And they used that to dismiss me.”

“But how? Who has told them anything?”

“I don’t know. I can’t think that Mrs. Courtman would—can you? Besides, she is away. Do you know a lady called Mrs. Gigshaw? She lives in South Kensington—in the same part as Mrs. Courtman—Darnley Gardens.”

“I believe I’ve seen her—yes. A showy, loud old lady, with an absurd air of being a smart society woman. She goes about in a yellow motor. Yes, I recollect her now. Why?”

“She is supposed to have been the instrument in ridding the club of my—my tainted presence,” said Mary, laughing ruefully. “She meant no personal harm to me, I suppose; it was really her revenge on Lady Jiberene, who did not ask her to her party, but who asked me. You see that was considered a dreadful insult. She put the other side up, it seems, to this mischief in order to annoy Lady Jiberene.”

“Yes, Miss Jacques’ party—the rival party.”

“But how did Mrs. Gigshaw herself know anything about you?”

“Ah, that is it. That I can’t say. She does not know Mrs. Courtman to speak to, so it cannot be from her. I know she

doesn't, because she was always badgering Mrs. Holden to introduce her, and——"

"Mrs. Holden? What Mrs. Holden?"

"Oh, Mrs. Alec. Holden, of Radnor Gardens. The lady of your Crafts Guild."

Cartyn suddenly saw the clue.

"Well, at any rate, I'm glad it is not Florence. I *am* free to think well of Florence. That would have broken my heart, quite, I think," Mary went on. "Mrs. Gigshaw can make any mischief she pleases so long as she leaves me my old friend's memory untouched by such a trick as that."

"Was Mrs. Holden a Hoyden? Surely not?"

"Oh no. She didn't really approve of them, but she came one day with Mrs. Gigshaw to see the club, and then she came again, once or twice. She came to show that she didn't approve, I think. She always used her lorgnette very much—and her elbows. I can't say I was pleased to see her; she did stare so at me, yet, as I think you once saw, she is too proud to acknowledge me. It is awkward, as we have been introduced, and have often spoken at the guild. Still, one takes no notice of these things. So many women are ill-bred nowadays that it is not astonishing, is it?"

"No, no, not at all," said Cartyn, but his tones were abstracted. He saw now from whom the mischief came. He recollected poor old Holden's clumsy but kindly meant attempt to hint to him that he had already heard something against Mary. He saw now, in his mind's eye, the careful garnering of such hints by the man's inplacable wife; her slow piling up of her treasure hoard; her fruitless attempts to interfere with his own friendship with Mary; and now the glorious chance, thrown at her very feet, to injure the cause of all her spleen and jealousy, through the unspeakable mischief-making of Mrs. Gigshaw. As the dreary, feline, petty scheme, with all its accompaniments of miaowings and scratchings, became clear to his mind's eye, he experienced that supreme revulsion against the accepted methods of femininity that, sometime or another, all honest male students of human nature must undergo; that pathetic mingling of surprise and indignation that makes a man want to get up and kick something very hard in a sheer access of contempt.

People now began to drop in, singly or in self-conscious pairs, as the real table d'hôte hour arrived, and they became aware

that they were being looked at with the blatant and unblushing interest that companions in such places evince. After all, an earnest-faced man in clerical dress talking eagerly over a table in a modulated whisper to a young, good-looking but shabby woman, and never taking his eyes off her face would excite the half-resentful interest of any unemployed Londoners one might name, and the usual speculative analysis, openly expressed in immovably staring eyes and a certain almost imperceptible falling of the lower jaw, now began. There are a vast number of persons who never do learn that they themselves are visible, but who will stare and stare and stare at others till all semblance of human intelligence has departed from their own faces, and yet remain delightfully unconscious that that which they openly study may be secretly studying them.

The row of these students becoming more compact and definite, Cartyn suggested a move, and Mary and he came away after she had cursorily tidied her hair and straightened herself a little. She looked a different creature to the worn being he had met trailing her weary way home to a lonely lodging, and suffering the first hour of shock and disappointment; the kindness, the sympathy, the cheery meal had done their work, and when he suggested a walk or a drive she seemed quite willing and cheerful. But she would not hear of a drive.

"Well, why not the top of a 'bus?" he said. "We could get some fresh air in a quarter of an hour if we made for Barnes Common. Shall we? Come along?"

He put her on a red 'bus, feeling a delightful sense of defiance at what Mrs. Holden would say if she could see him now! All the proprieties and conventions seemed to have retired to a fully deserved background in this hour of deep feeling and the proximity of real distress, and he even laughed a little to himself as he realised what a funny pair they must make together, at this late hour, going cheerfully westwards, trundling on a 'bus like any young shop-assistant and his girl towards the sunset. They talked of her plans for the future. At Hammersmith Broadway they changed 'buses and drove along Bridge Road, over the river, silver and strong in the evening light, then between the lines of trim houses with their neat shrubbery gardens and tiny carriage drives to the corner leading to the common; there they alighted and sauntered as any other two Cockney persons

might saunter—only they were not arm in arm—over the scrubby, furzy place, watching the lights flicker up here and there from the tree-embowered houses on the far fringe of the common as the blue dusk fell.

He came to a decision. He and his scruples had brought upon her the loss of Florence's help, his attentions had brought upon her the contumely of the parish; his silence about her story had brought her this cruel dismissal from her duties. There was an instinct in him stronger than that of the cleric. It was that of the chivalrous gentleman. He would rescue her, as a lover.

He took her hand now, in the cool blue shadows and the scent of invisible gorse, and said very slow, "Never mind all the world Leave all the world alone, and marry me."

CHAPTER XII

JUST for a moment all the warm home-lights round the common trees whirled about softly in the dusk.

Just for a moment there seemed to be a measured sound of home music, as though all those cosy houses and all those family hearths in a desolate, harsh, arid world, sang a chorussed paean of welcoming to her, who was having a man's home and love offered to her.

Then the night wind came fluttering coldly by, bearing on it faintly the distant ringing of church bells. The sound recalled them to a sort of parochial consciousness.

"She said, 'No, no,'" and drew away, with a sob in her heart.

"Yes," he insisted, still holding invincibly on to her hand. "You shall."

But though he held her hand fast he was looking at her with inquiry, earnest inquiry, eager, sincere enough but—well, that there was room for it! A lover does not inquire. A real lover takes, insists. Had he insisted then she would have yielded. But she felt the faint chill of the inquiry like an embodiment of the church bells' far tinkle.

His tall, thin figure, the shadow of his high tall hat against the evening sky's faint opal, looming over the deep rather contracted eyes that she could imagine better than see, the low dark bushes against the stubbly grass, the fluttering night-wind, the distant suburban houses, the thing he offered—it was all like a dream. It all seemed to have happened before, somehow. She was waiting still for that insistence. She had always waited, it seemed to her.

"No," she answered again. "It is impossible."

Still he lacked the lover's daring greed.

"But why?" he asked.

"I shouldn't do for the parish," she answered, voicing with that ancient intuitive feminine genius his own actual thought. "A person in any kind of trouble could not be introduced to the

archdeacon, could she? Or if the archdeacon was kind—he might be, being a man—what about the women? Oh no, no.”

He winced a little.

“You and I,” he replied bravely, “know what you are.”

“I know myself,” she replied, under her breath. “But placed as I am I can do nothing to prove it to any one else—even to you.”

If he had answered passionately then, put those near arms round her and insisted, been just a man, she would have yielded. But there was a fatal pause, and the church bells came in on the night wind. They brought with them a very menace of the narrowest “churchly” spirit. In imagination, by their very sound, one could see thin women in ugly hats going there in a stern handful, hear them answer their own alternative verse of the Psalm in cryptic accents, smell the mingled odour of russia leather and new oak and cold stone at the chill weeknight even-song, feel the dead chill of everlasting disapproval. They were an awful reminder.

Cartyn felt it. It was inevitable. Was not this the call of his own, the warning voice from the shadowy things in which he lived? He paused a second to listen to it, half in rebellion; but in that pause he lost his hour. Abruptly the thin bells stopped. With a start he leaned again towards her.

He spoke quickly, but after a long silence. Though she was unaware of it, he knew of what she was thinking only too well.

“I cannot take that for an answer. Let me wait, Mary,” he said hurriedly. “You will think it over. Do not decide now. I have been too sudden.”

“No,” said Mary, “it isn’t that. It is as I say. There is an insuperable barrier to my marrying again. I tell you I am in the position of a person accused of a crime—an innocent person—but still one unable to prove my innocence. You cannot marry such a person. Don’t try. You know the difficulties.”

“But—if I believe the truth?”

“Oh, you—yes. But what about your people, your parish, all those who are dependent on you, for whom you live? I could not come between you and them. And yet that is what I should do.”

“I am indifferent to their opinion, good or bad! Do I care--

do *we* care, Mary, if we have each other? Who, if he loved as I do, would care? The parish's opinion!"

"You would care—you would have to. It is your duty to care, because you are the chief and the leader. Should I not care seeing such a thing happen to you? Oh, can't you hear them, Mr. Cartyn?—I can, as though they were all clamouring round me now! 'There is a story against her—oh, a most unfortunate connection. Yes, my dear, I have friends at Bahore. Oh, a vague story, yes; but there is no smoke without fire!' Why, I can see their faces as they say it. I can see their bonnets. Oh, can't you see their bonnets?" She laughed, rather bitterly, but her eyes were tearful. Cartyn shook his head with miserable impatience.

"What do these things matter? You yourself are a witness to yourself. Could any man or woman look into your clear eyes and believe anything but good of you? Does not God set a seal upon the face? I know it."

"You forget that it is not given to every eye to see—the seal of God," she answered softly and sadly.

"Then for those who cannot see it I care nothing at all!"

Mary spoke quietly. "You care for your career, and for your work. You care for the good of your people you have in charge more than for yourself. If I did not think you did that it would not be—so hard—for me to argue like this. It is because you are so beloved and so followed as a teacher that I cannot consent to do this thing, which would drag you down."

"How could it?" said Cartyn, passionately. "Such a falsehood could not drag me down, or you either—the truth would always prevail. The truth is stronger than lies. It will prove itself."

"Yes, perhaps after long years, if even then. But meanwhile what would you not have to go through in my defence—my impossible defence? Even you know nothing of the story, and if people came to you with it, you would have no answer for them. I shall never speak of it—it would do no good, even in my own defence, because the stigma has been fixed upon me in a way that makes my own protests useless."

"Suppose," said Cartyn, turning suddenly and looking at her. "suppose I told you I knew the story?—not how I know, but just the fact that it was known to me?"

"But you couldn't. I mean you couldn't know—the truth. If

you have heard any story—any rumour at all—then it is the scandal. The truth is known only to myself and God.”

“Another,” Cartyn paused, guarding his betraying voice carefully, “another might guess it?”

“No, no. No one could guess it. It is a long, wild tale of injustice, but it sleeps in its grave!”

“Mary, you tell me! Let me hear it from your own lips!” His voice rang out hot and passionately, vibrant with a new wild hope. Suppose he could induce her to tell him herself—then, indeed, would his tongue be unloosed. This, at least, would not be confession.

It would free him from his honourable silence, already galling like a chain round his feet.

“But I can’t,” said Mary, very low, and turning her head away. Her accents were hurried and slurring, “I don’t know half of it myself. I was sent up into a hill-station. Men made a fuss of us if we were young. Well, then, there was one made a fuss of me. I saw nothing in it. He was some one we knew quite well. He knew my husband. I was only a girl. I thought married women could talk quite safely to men. I did not even admire him; because I didn’t, I was just the more polite—women, honest women, are like that. They’re often sorry they cannot like particular men, sorry they have limp moustaches, or long beards, or yellow hair, or something else they hate from their souls. So, regarding them as pariahs, they are polite to them. That was all I was. I don’t think he imagined anything silly. He was perhaps a little vain of our friendship, and boasted. But it was somebody else must have made the ridiculous, trifling matter into a scandal. There were several older women, jealous perhaps, who might have done it. I have often thought of that. But who it was I have never clearly been able to guess. My husband was at that time ill and half-maddened with his morphia habit. It is quite possible that a few words of chatter from some thoughtless person fixed the idea in his mind! That is all I can tell you. I know no more!”

He had listened to all this breathlessly, his head bent down to hers, though he could see little in the dusky evening glimmer of her troubled face and eyes, already weary of her old, conjecture-ridden story. To her it had already the maddening staleness of an ancient lawsuit. She had already learnt to feel dead-

ened and weary in recounting it. Like all fine natures long harped upon by mean sorrow as a vulgar hand harps on one string, she was lax and done to death long ago, and could give out no more tragic sound. Perhaps that fact made her suffer more, seeing that to him she must appear cynical.

"What was his name?" he said jealously.

She rallied at the sound.

"His name was Vizier," she answered. "He was a captain in one of our regiments up there."

"But you didn't care up there?"

"How can you ask? Of course not. I tell you I thought nothing of it. You would have thought nothing of it."

"But how could even enemies say anything against you?"

"No one honestly could. But I was careless once, about returning alone with him from some party. We were delayed by an accident. Even then all could have been explained, but that some one chose to make ill of it."

Ah, if he would have taken her by force, told her (so truly!) that he did not believe it. But still the very silence that the bells had left was potent.

He took her two hands then and kissed her. Yet in the void left by the bells, like two children who have been scolded, they turned round then and instinctively went in the direction of home. It was a loving, a sweet, a sacred walk amongst the gorse bushes in the soft night. They had for ever bridged over all silence, yet there was something fierce and irrevocable still between. Mary knew it with bitterness. She let her hand rest on his arm till they reached the edge of the common, that strong man's arm that felt so kind and powerful. But she knew that in his mind there was a little tussle going on, for all his real love of her. She was too lonely to struggle against the encroaching touch and charm of this dear affection; but she knew, or thought she knew, that it had its limits—that the parish was a stronger rival!

He took her all the way home, and bade her good-bye, with all his heart in his eyes. When he went home his mind was in a tumult of plans and conjectures. As he entered his bleak vicarage, the Preuginos looked particularly chilly and unpromising. It was all very monastic, but he did not feel at all monastic himself. He felt so little like that that he was angry at his ugly house. Till then, he hardly knew how much he had hoped for Mary, how un-

consciously he had adorned his house in imagination with the idea of her presence. Now its big staircase looked bare and empty, and the tiled hall seemed to echo the sound of his footsteps more lonely than usual. He asked his man if any one had been there. Several messages were given him, and a card bearing Mr. Holden's name.

"Has Mr. Holden been, then?"

"Yes, sir; he is coming again later. Will you see him?"

"Yes. I expect it's something about that education affair. Show him into the study when he comes."

Mr. Holden's visit was certainly about educational affairs, but it referred not so much to the education of the parish, as to that of its pastor.

He arrived after the vicar had finished supper and was about to begin some writing that must be finished that night. An air of unspeakable tiresome expansiveness pervaded his manner, and he was so amazingly overfriendly that even Cartyn felt a vague suspicion steal over him.

"Ha, vicar, how are you?" he cried heartily. "Forgive a tiresome old bore of a fellow for bothering you at this time of night. Shan't stay long. Well, how's the parish?"

As they had only just met at a vestry meeting, this question fell flat, as there was no news (tellable news) to tell. Mr. Holden's manner was usually so soporifically dull that the spectacle of him, bursting with noisy geniality, was disconcerting, even ominous.

"Did you want thost title-deed papers?" said Cartyn, referring to some of their mutual school business. "I was intending to send them around to you."

"Oh no, no. Oh well, yes. That's partly what I came for."

"And anything else I can do?"

"Oh dear, no. In fact, vicar, I'm in a bit of bog, I tell you—fact is—have a cigar? Eh? No?—There's some gossip going about this hole of a place; trust those kites of women to pounce on it. They're making the most of it, too. I thought, as a friend, you'd not mind my just mentioning it, and for Heaven's sake don't get angry with *me*, for it isn't my fault."

He fidgeted over the lighting of his cigar, and glanced uneasily up at Cartyn, whose face had, in spite of himself, gone graver. The vicar spoke.

"There is always gossip in every community, Holden. I suppose it's human nature! But it's something rather below that to

repeat it, isn't it? Something nearer, say, monkey nature."

"Oh, certainly, certainly—to pass it about and all that. But just as a sort of warning, eh? Oh, *I* don't attach any importance to such rubbish, but I thought I——"

"Oh, don't. If it's about me, my good friend, I shall survive, I assure you. Come, tell me what you thought of Raike's speech the other night? Wasn't that a bumping meeting?"

"Yes, yes. Grand. Stupendous. As you say—bumping. But this affair—I say, vicar, are you going to get married?"

Cartyn's face was a study.

"I?" he said. Who said that?"

"But you aren't, then? Oh well, do forgive me; but that's what they're saying."

"Who?"

"The women, bless 'em. You know their way!"

"Well, you have my sanction to contradict the rumour emphatically. That will stop it."

Holden looked dubiously at the blue smoke curling up from his cigar; he also looked very miserable, as miserable as a man always does look when sent by a woman to do her dirty work. In that blue smoke the face of Mrs. Holden, wearing the expression of the Cheshire cat with flinty, hard eyes, beamed determinedly upon him. So he stuck to his duty.

"Why, no," he said ruminatively, "I don't think it will, you know. Because—oh, well, you parsons have to go to lots of places and see lots of folks, I know—but some of these ladies have seen you, or heard of you, visiting some one in the parish who you either ought or ought not to marry—blest if I can gather which they want! Forgive me, vicar, there's a dear good man?"

Poor Holden's manifest discomfort at his impertinent task softened Cartyn's ready wrath a little, though a vision of Mrs. Holden and her busybody set, her marriage-hunting daughters, her parochial worldliness, came to him too, and he, too, beheld a mirage of a Cheshire puss not at all flattering to that worthy woman.

"The ladies are very kind," he said, controlling his voice. "If I marry all the women I visit I shall have my work cut out."

"Oh well, you know, vicar, what they are! Fact is, this one I believe, is a—well, a pretty one. That makes a lot of difference. For my part, I like that sort. I remember the lady they

mean—we saw her in your vestry after church the other evening. I don't blame you, goodness knows. Only, I'd got to repeat the matter, in case you did not know what they were saying."

"Well, it wouldn't be so unheard of if I did get married, would it? Why warn me?"

"Fact is," said Mr. Holden, almost inaudibly and absolutely apoplectic in his discomfiture, "they've hit on some beastly tale about the poor lady. They say she's—she's not all square, or something. Something about India and a will. My wife got hold of some old friends of hers from Bahore and fished it all out—you recollect we're Anglo-Indians ourselves? There's probably nothing in it, but you, as a young parson, ought to know quite what——"

"I, as a parson, can take care of myself," said Cartyn. "The lady in question unfortunately cannot do so. Sufficiently to say that I know her entire history, a very sad one, from other lips than her own, and it satisfies me. I say no more."

"Oh well, well, that's all right, that's all right! I knew it would be," said poor Holden, painfully relieved at having got through his errand so peaceably after all. "So, I'll just silence the lot of 'em—my lot of 'em. I'll say you know your own business and the lady's too. You see they turned her out of the Crafts Guild over this, but now I'll tell 'em if they want to hear the rights of anything, they're to come to you themselves. Shall I?"

"No," said Cartyn sternly.

"But won't you stand up for the poor lady—just say a word in her defence?"

"No. I can't. I can't explain."

"But, good heavens, a nice little woman like that being attacked by the others, and you——"

"It's no good. I've said all I can." Cartyn's face was white and quiet.

"Then, vicar, I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid those fussy tabbies will make her miserable," said Holden.

Cartyn rose up and turned away his face.

"They must, Holden. My lips are sealed," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

LADY JIBERENE'S drawing-room, or drawing-rooms, wore, in the month of August, something the appearance of a canvas sea on the stage, only in this case the leaping billows were of musty white calico sheeting, and, moreover, they did not leap. Everything was covered in sheets, the blinds were drawn, and the windows shut out the hot outside air, producing an odour of dust and mustiness singularly clogging to the spirits, but for that matter, of course, no one was expected to go into these forsaken halls at all for at least two months, as their presiding genius and her family were out of town, visiting on the Continent and in Scotland. But the day Cartyn called, and very urgently insisted on seeing her, she happened to be what is politely called a "ghost," that is to say, she was in town, but you had to pretend you didn't know she was. She had just rushed up for two days' business, but if you met her in the street you were supposed to look straight through her, unless you wished to give offence. And on no account might you call. Cartyn, however, with masculine scorn for these degrees of disembodiment, made a perfectly confident dash at her portal, and insisted on asking so many questions of the footman out of livery, whose face wanted a good wash, and who answered the third ring at the bell yawning, that at last he did manage to force his way into the echoing mansion, and was not at all crushed when he found himself shown into the canvas ocean drawing-room—not even the large salon, nor yet the next to that, but the smallest and meanest of all, **where on** fête days they bundled the shabbiest chairs and the imitation Blue Hungarian Band and the frumps—the very real frumps, collected by my lady's philanthropy from sources undreamed of, and willing to sit round the walls and admire what they really believed was London society. He waited fifteen minutes. Lady Jiberene did come in in the end, though he began to wonder if she ever meant to, and a rigidity of her plump, red face, and a certain tightness in her smile, informed him that she was not pleased at

his intrusion on her ghosthood. But in his own eyes his errand was too vital to allow these influences to distress him. He began at once, almost cutting short Lady Jiberene's elaborate explanation of her oddly shrouded house, and told her that he had heard of Mrs. Fresne's dismissal from the club, and would like to talk to her about it for a very few minutes. The tight smile became a sort of uncomfortable pinch, and Lady Jiberene's eyes looked troubled and a little vindictive.

"Oh, the trouble I have been put to over that most tiresome affair!" she said. "Are you really going to open up the subject again, Mr. Cartyn? I thought I had put it behind me for ever."

"I'm sorry," he said; "but you have been so kind to Mrs. Fresne in the past that I thought you would perhaps tell me, as no one else could, why she was so summarily dismissed, and whether the committee would not be willing to retract their decision and ask her to return. I believe her work was satisfactory?"

"Oh, perfectly. Oh, of course, it was not that. Really, Mr. Cartyn," the poor ghost glanced worriedly round its calico ocean, "I have not time now to go into the ins and outs of the affair. But as a matter of fact I have resigned myself."

Cartyn reflected that there were evidently fewer "ins" than "outs."

"Oh, then I need not trouble you," he said. "If your good influence is removed from the club, Mrs. Fresne need hardly wish to return to it. But may I not ask," he paused a moment, "whether you will not continue to interest yourself further in Mrs. Fresne? She needs a woman friend very badly. I come, of course, entirely on my own responsibility, for I am interested in her—as a parishioner," he added, a little guiltily.

A harder look came into Lady Jiberene's broad bucolic countenance, robbing it of even the traditional geniality that its ruddy cheeks and quickly moving blue eyes generally gained for it.

"Women friends, Mr. Cartyn, are to be had in plenty by all women who will be frank and candid about themselves. I have nothing to say personally against Mrs. Fresne, but I must say this—she is not candid."

"Will you be so, and tell me how she fails in this way?" he said. "In what way is she not candid?"

"I don't know how much she has told you. I don't know upon what terms you and she are. But you may have heard that there

are two bitterly opposing factions at the club, and that I, as a social leader, I am told!—who would have power, Mr. Cartyn—was placed at the head of one of these. A great trouble was made by the vulgar party of the opposite side about many trifling things; it came to a head recently, and Mrs. Fresne, as my nominee was attacked in my train, of course. A certain story—a very odd story—about India and a will, was, in fact, brought up against her by a clique which shall be nameless. Of course, I repudiated it and placed the matter before her myself, fully expecting her to answer, and at once clear the matter up. To my surprise, she would do nothing of the kind. She simply refused to speak. I tried every means in my power to make her, and asked her many and searching questions. I was, I may say, most tactful. But she would say nothing, so I could not silence the rumour, and the club voted against her. I could understand her reserve towards the committee; they attacked her with unwarrantable rudeness. But to *me* she should have put things straight. I was her friend. I deserved to know it."

"But if the story, as you call it, was got up by a clique savagely determined on revenge, surely you could hardly take it seriously yourself?"

Lady Jiberene's plump face flushed uncomfortably.

"Clergymen, unfortunately, do not always see life as it is," she retorted. "Life in the world, the great social world, is far more complicated than the Bible thinks."

"It is certainly complicated. I don't think there is anything in the Bible that states it to be otherwise. But surely in such a sea of confusion the only hope is in straight-steering," half-consciously he glanced round at the calico billows rolling off desolately into grey space as he let fall the nautical phrase.

"Oh, I see you are Mrs. Fresne's partisan," said Lady Jiberene. Partisan! Again the foolish word, used as a reproach. Was their idea of the priestly office to be always a remote, aloof vagueness, giving its blessing alike on the just and on the unjust? Whether for good or for evil, he reflected, he was a man with a man's feelings. He could not turn himself into a passionless negation in the name of his office.

He looked back at Lady Jiberene with a hard look for look.

"She has so few friends, it is perhaps her clergyman's duty," he answered, a sharply stern note in his voice showing his inner

thought. The little philanthropist played with her watchchain, looking confused and eager, and tears, real, wet, blinking tears, came into her worried eyes. She was plainly torn by conflicting desires.

"I am willing to be the friend of all women," she said. "I count them all my dear sisters. Have not my influence and money been devoted to brightening dull lives, the helping of the helpless, the cause of suffering women for years. I have done my best for Mrs. Fresne—I took *such* an interest in her. I quite brought her forward. She came to my reunions. I introduced her to the Guild of Harmony. Lots of people at the club were willing to bow to her as my protégé. Really, Mr. Cartyn, clergyman as you are, and naturally not so keen about the great progress of humanity for humanity's sake as are we poor worldlings, you must admit that I have done much for that lady?"

"Of course I do. That is why I appeal to you now." But her brow contracted, in spite of the tears.

"Very well. I will do what I can—if she will tell me her whole history from the beginning. I must, however, have frankness. It is only fair. To-morrow I am off to Wiesbaden, and in September we go to Scotland and a round of visits. When I come back—I will see."

He had to be satisfied with this, and the tears. But it was a grim satisfaction.

She accompanied him to the hall door, her old, sweet, genial voice with its yearning, motherly intonation having returned in full force after her late somewhat acrid tones, holding forth on our sweet service for our dear sisters in distress most eloquently and touchingly. She said it was her Life Work.

He went out again into the hot streets, equally wrathful with himself and with her. What an idiot he had been to call on such a woman hoping for a generous action! Were they all shams, he said? Yet Lady Jiberene was not a sham, in the opprobrious sense of meaning to be one, at any rate. She really believed in herself and her schemes for the benefit of womankind, so much so that if you didn't believe in her too you made her cry. More than that what could one expect?

But for Mary's urgent trouble to wait the return from that round of visits! That was what roused him to wrath and ac-

tion that he was never to forget. He knew only too well the shortness of means she must suffer until she could get some fresh employment; and the middle of summer, of all times in the industrial year, was the very worst moment for her to be seeking it. She had resisted his offers of advice with her old pride, and had told him she should take up her humble work of reporting, only too readily put aside for the club appointment. Any turning of the conversation by himself into this really burning question of ways and means had almost made her lose her temper, and he had to go warily even with his suggestions for future employment. His attempt to offer assistance in the way of a loan had been met with actual indignation. He dare not do more in that way. What he did must be done through others, and done quickly.

After leaving Lady Jiberene's he went to see Mary. He had never once ventured to face the stern portals of the ginger rabbit since the day he had been rejected, remembering that the parish was lynx-eyed, even in these unfashionable quarters, and not wishing to bring any further talk about her head. It so happened that the people next door were humble church members, and their children, for ever on the front door steps, attended his Sunday-school. Remembering the perfect passion for gossip that is so characteristic of the poor he had to be careful.

She thought he looked white and thinner, his once boyish face harder in outline, and something lacking in his old almost jaunty air of abruptness. He said it was the heat, and gave, as excuse for his visit, an account, much softened, of Lady Jiberene's words.

"If you," he said very low, avoiding her eyes, and playing abstractedly with the edge of some sewing she had been doing, "would have been frank with her, she said, she could have done much!"

"Why do you expect it?" said Mary, her voice betraying a sudden heat. "She cannot expect me to give to her, and the whole club, a full account of my life, like a felon on trial or a probationer for a reformatory! No, for all that she might offer I will never stoop to that. What could I say? Hasn't everything been said that could be?"

"No." Cartyn thundered out the word with a suddenness

that startled them both. "Mary," he continued, getting up and going to her, lifting her two hands from the sewing, one with the thimble still on the small-tipped finger, "you could be cleared easily—easily. We could do it. I could do it, to-night, any time."

"You?" She sat still on her chair gazing up at him, her hands still in his. Then, as his eyes burnt down into hers, aflame with their furious eagerness, a slow, unutterably sweet smile came over her patient, pale face, illuminating it and making it beautiful and girlish all at once. "Why, James, how could *you* do it?"

She had never called him "James" before. The darling fact was like intoxication to his baffled, trouble love. For the moment he forgot his trust, his sacred guardianship, his "priestly honour" as he had once put it; forgot all save the utter dearness of this gentle, injured thing, who, by the sacred confession of their mutual love, he must for ever count as a part of himself, looking up softly and calling him "James" like a wife. All his scruples, all his questionings, all his difficulties, seemed swept away by this sense of their nearness, their oneness, under God—the sense that between the two who loved truly, woman and man, there should be no shadow of a secret.

"I could do it," he said. "Suppose I know who wronged you? Suppose I had it from her own lips? I——"

"Her? Her lips?" said Mary. Her face was white. "Whose? Who do you mean?"

He was still gazing down into her eyes and holding her hands in a tight grip, but his own face was growing steadily whiter.

"Can you guess?" he began.

"Guess?" But what—what are you talking about?"

He began hurriedly. "Women come to us in their troubles. We have to hear tales of misery from both men and women. I——"

"Confession?" said Mary, but she said it slowly and deliberately and solemnly, as though thinking out the meaning of the term for herself, not hinting an accusation, as yet. "You mean confession?"

"They call it that sometimes." His voice was low.

"Yes. But isn't it sacred? You can't repeat?"

"It—it is a matter of judgment, in this case," he began. But

something flashed suddenly into Mary's eyes. She stood up and taking her hands from his put one on each of his shoulders, firmly and bravely, and stood away from him looking into his face.

"God keep you true to yourself," she said, very gently and with strange earnestness.

He dropped his forehead forward on to her shoulder. "Forgive, forgive!" he said.

"Not I," she said, and even a little ripple of her low, tender laugh shook her voice. "I am not the judge of laws to be broken for my sake! Ah dear, go back, go back to your great work—and to yourself. You are God's first, then mine. Leave me, James, lest you speak. To-night, dear, we will pray."

And he left her, stumbling blindly down her shabby staircase, dim with the hot summer gloaming, and out into her wretched street. He knew then what she was. And desperately and with bitter contempt he knew himself.

But when he had gone, she stood up and let her sewing fall, bit by bit out of her hand. She was gazing straight out towards the narrow window, but she saw nothing of the grey street, bathed in the August sunshine, and the row of dingy houses opposite.

She saw a bevy of faces away in India, gay faces, laughing faces, sneering faces, careless faces. She saw the face of a woman friend with furtive eyes, that met one's own briefly and then shifted. They were heavily lidded, cunning, stupid eyes. They were Florence Courtman's.

She saw a series of pictures, rushing one after the other: a sick man, violent, moody, jealous, demented: a kind woman friend always in attendance, always making light of her services as a cheering visitor—only with those eyes. Strange, she had never noticed the shifting of those eyes before.

To very innocent unsuspecting people, the true meaning of some significant act will only come long after its commission. Strange things, odd looks, odd happenings, now pieced themselves together like the parts of a puzzle, a terrible inexorable puzzle. Bit by bit the little jagged corners fitted neatly, making a growing whole. Florence's odd offer at Lady Jiberene's. Her strange manner, her furtive, almost angry attempts to get her

to take money. Suddenly dropping her sewing entirely, and letting her thimble go rolling across the floor, she pushed impulsively into the next room and tore open the big box from whose depths she had brought forth the silver and black Indian embroidery. Tearing over its contents, the medley of quaint treasures with their delicate sandal-wood fragrance, she came to a carved box of yellowish ivory, which she brought out and hastily tried to open. For a few minutes she struggled, not understanding the turn of the stiff fastenings, then the thing fell suddenly open, disclosing two or three packets of letters untidy, yellow, and torn.

The whole collection seemed to be a muddle of torn and dirty sheets, some with marks of liquid spilled on to them, like coffee stains, some only half covered with crooked, illegible writing. She shuddered and uttered some quick word of disgust as her fingers touched them to turn them over—her husband's last few personal papers, the things he had clung to with frantic insistence in his last illness. They bore all the squalid insignia of the confirmed morphia maniac. The hurried, blotched, irregular writing leading here, there, and everywhere; now large, now small, now cramped and crooked, and now in jagged flourishes. She knew the whole thing so well. She had only glanced at these hideous scribblings once, hurriedly, in her early widowhood, and had then in an access of horror consigned them back to their box. She now picked up one of the dirty half-sheets; it was covered with semi-intelligible ravings in which her name appeared here and there.

Evidently these were the few last dreary fragments of a self-destroyed mind, its last wretched attempts to collect written evidence of its own delusions. Some of the scribbles did not even include her name; one was a petty rave against the "brutal" behaviour of the maniac's own doctor, blotted, incoherent, terrible. It broke off in the middle of a sentence. She was pushing the loathsome things back into their case, when a sheet of different handwriting caught her eye—clear, large, splashing, flamboyant—a woman's writing.

She picked it up and examined it. It was evidently part of a letter that had been torn like the rest, probably in the miserable man's ravings, and it began in the middle of a sentence but Mary read—

“—true that she has gone too far with Vizier. Everybody is talking about it. Dear friend, I do feel for you. That last affair of the gymkhana is now known. She and he did not arrive home till the small hours of the morning. She was driving with him alone. They called it an accident, but of course—well, we know what to believe. I have made full inquiries, but everything points to its being a deliberate case, a planned thing. Dear old Morrie, for the old days’ sake, I pity you from my heart; but what can be done? I can only advise you after this to put her out of your life, to——”

The vile thing broke off here, the sheet being torn away. With mad hands, she tore over the rest of the rubbish, but there was nothing more there. This half-sheet was all that remained of the betrayal. It was undated, of course, and had no signature. But it did not need one.

The writing was Florence Courtman’s.

Then she knew what he meant. She knew at last who was her Judas.

CHAPTER XIV

"THERE'S something gone wrong with the vicar."

"What?"

"I'm not liking the looks of him," said the verger.

"Why don't he get married? The vicar of St. Ph'lup's buried three wives before he was his age," said the pew-cleaner. She pronounced St. Phillip "St. Ph'lup." She had a dingy black dress to sweep in with the jet trimmng on the bodice, drab with dust.

"Oh, I know all about that," said Tolley. "And it ain't never too late to begin having a gay time, is it? But you can't always reckon on luck like that."

"The vicar of St. Ph'lup's, let me tell you, was a fine, well-set-up gen'leman. Rather heavy to sit under, but wore lovely boots. Parliament, they do say, thought such a lot of him being so promiscuous as a widower, as one might say, that they give him a canon-stall somewheres. I don't know where he ran it, but he left St. Ph'lup's."

"Oh, along of the cats'-meat stalls, no doubt," said Tolley, with fine sarcasm. "Well, he deserved rewarding for killing off a few women."

"I don't want none of your no-class sayings!" snapped the pew-cleaner, stopping suddenly in her business of sweeping out a pew, a casual occupation at best, that made far more sound of knocking on the wooden panels than obvious improvement in the dirt.

Tolley shook his head impatiently.

"Well, don't talk so, then. I was saying there's something wrong with the vicar. He's not looking himself. Here's the summer going, and he's lost all his good spirits."

"It's just want of a holiday," said the pew-lady.

"'Tain't—it's too many services," said the verger dictatorially, glancing over her bent and fussy figure with a cold eye. "What for does a man want to get up before his natural time and go

to church, that's what I want to know? We didn't have nearly so much churchgoing in my young days."

"That I can see," said the pew-opener, resenting this contradiction by raking about under the seat with much racket; "you're a warning to us what we might 'a been."

"You'll be very clever if you ever come to what I am!" said the vergier, with some sternness and heat; "an honest man is none so common!"

"Yes, I'll certainly be clever—seeing I was born an honest woman," said the lady, poking a grimed and red-nosed face in a stringy bonnet over the pew-top like a Jack-in-a-box.

"I'm glad to hear that," said the vergier; "seeing to what you've come in your old age!"

He shuffled away haughtily, but with celerity—menaced by the stringy bonnet and the angry head wagging indignantly over the pew-top. He caught murmurs of, "A pore ignorant fellow kep' on charity," but was clever enough to shut himself into the fastnesses of his vestry before he need really pretend to have heard, and so resent the sting.

But the vicar, after his interview with Lady Jiberene and, following it, his never-to-be-forgotten talk with Mary, gave himself night and day to the ever-present longing—the longing that was gradually becoming an obsession—to do something for her, something to break this frightful chain of circumstances that had closed around her. One of the first things he did, after his self-abasement, was about the only thing he could do: he wrote to Florence Courtman. He had to write the letter twice over, fearing that the first too strongly betrayed his too human indignation. He told her all that had happened to Mary, the struggle and difficulty she was now in; he even pleaded the fact that she looked ill, and described her dear troubles, as only, perhaps, a lover could describe them. That was the first letter, and that he tore up, because its final appeal for justice worked up into an accusatory note at the end, a note almost threatening in its intensity. It was not a priest's letter—it was a lover's hot defence, appeal.

Then he remembered that, as a confessor, he must not write such a letter; he had not the right. All he could do was to appeal to her better nature, to urge again the infinite necessity for restoring happiness to the woman she had injured. But

with his best endeavour this letter read sternly and coldly. He was not sure of her whereabouts—all her letters were forwarded to her from Darnley Gardens, but he guessed she would possibly be at Marienbad or thereabouts at this time, in the midst of gaiety and recreation. In imagination he could see the sunny boulevards, the gay terraces, the fluttering crowds; hear the music, feel the light, cooling airs on his face; and then he would turn in thought to the little narrow court of Loder Street, the airless, streety atmosphere, the close, hot rooms, the noisy children, the ginger rabbit munching cynically at bits of jaded yellow lettuce, and the pale girl flagging there in undeserved adversity. It was a maddening comparison.

Sometimes, as the weeks went on, he felt a wild desire to make her marry him, and risk the consequences from which he had shrunk. Suppose he did, and people did say "things," wasn't he perfectly capable of holding his own and braving it all out in his own way? Of course he was.

And then came another difficulty—was it just to her? An unknown young widow, attractive, mysterious, living in a slum in his own parish, to be raised suddenly without warning to be head of the vicarage, put over all those ladies of wealth and position to whose efforts he owed so much—certainly it would cause talk. They were not all Mrs. Holdens—far from it—but they would naturally find his impulsive action astonishing and probably offensive. It would, done in such a clandestine way as would be almost a necessity, give real and deep offence in a parish so large and far-reaching as his, and its consequences might go on indefinitely creating harm and ill-feeling. And all this Mary would have to bear alone, for in such matters a man cannot really help a woman. Socially, she always stands alone, and must always face at least the drawing-room guns unaided by her masculine host, whoever she may be; and it takes some spirit to do this well, especially when those guns start booming with the coffee after dinner, before the men come with the bland platitudes on their lips, believing, or pretending to believe, that they are entering a nest of doves, and not a battlefield strewn with the slain and wounded.

He gave up his holiday impulsively. He would not, at least, desert her in that hot, airless, parched London, at a moment when all her friends had done so. She was busy making brave

plans for the future, taking up her old literary work. He himself was daily hoping for Florence's return. He wrote to Mary, after that interview when he had so nearly betrayed his penitent, a sad little letter asking her to at least attend sufficiently to her health to take the only sort of change of air possible; to come and meet him for a walk in Kew Gardens.

The weather was so close, and the temptation to see him so strong, that she went. She said nothing at the moment of her discovery of the old letter, but a plan was growing slowly in her mind, and was adding a gravity and wistfulness to her eyes, that he thought due to their mutual trouble. She could keep a secret better than he could. But in the quaint old Georgian gardens she threw off her sadness, at least for the time, and began to chuckle in her old way with half-rueful fun, because she had just received an anonymous gift of money, a five pound note, with which she seemed abnormally delighted, though goodness knows she needed it.

"Anonymous, did you say?" he had said, placing a hand on her shoulder affectionately, and looking over the missive with her.

"Yes—no, oh no! look, here is a slip of paper! Oh, only typewritten though, and unsigned. How disappointing!"

He had picked it up and they read it together. Its curt legend ran—"From a Hoyden who likes fair play."

There was no signature. A Hoyden! It was that which filled Mary's heart with jubilation.

"How sweet of her—how dear!" she said. "I'm so glad, then, they've some of them remembered me kindly, after all! Who can it be?"

"Don't you know the style?"

"Style of typing?"

"Oh dear, no—of self-expression. 'Fair play'—'fair play'! That's a mannish phrase. Do they all talk like that?"

"I know!" said Mary, her eyes dancing; "it's Muriel Hyde. Of course it is. That is one her special sayings. 'Fair play.' Of course; how utterly sweet of her, and oh, fancy it being that side to do me a kindness!"

"What side?"

"Why, she's a Jacquesite," said Mary, looking at him gravely,

as gravely as if she had been saying, "she's an Israelite." He laughed at her and with her.

That had been a little oasis in their journey of trouble that long and wearisome autumn, that flash of kindly generosity from a woman who Mary had never dreamed was a friend; a little bit of unexpected cheer that made them merry for a time. But all the time there was **growing, gradually but surely**, a sense of certainty that she was doing him harm, was injuring and crippling his life, and, rapidly following it, her steady resolve to go away, for a time at least, and hide herself where he could not follow. She was possibly mistaken in this, but it was at least a generous mistake, and made amidst bitter tears and hours of struggle and longing, alone in her quiet room.

She set about her little business of living again on the fifty pounds a year with restored enthusiasm. She lost no time in calling on Mr. Calvin Hopper. That worthy *littérateur*, philosopher, and philanthropist, was kind, if busy and up to the eyes in some tremendous projects of his own for the good of mankind, and so naturally a little difficult to enlist in the cause of an out-of-work and poor lady reporter.

It was something rather to be wondered at that he gave her a personal interview in his little den in Paternoster Row just then: the marvel was that, being so much more busy than usual, he did not consign her insignificant little interview to some lesser luminary in the crowded and dusty outer office. It was a hot August afternoon when she made the attempt to get another footing on this literary ladder; the sun blazed along the streets and made the Holborn pavements like a fiery furnace, and the still heat carried out of the various restaurants heavy smells of dinner, so that even the dinnerless might believe they had dined. Mary went on a 'bus-top looking longingly as she lumbered past into the Holborn shops where linen frocks were displayed at ludicrously cheap prices for the benefit of lucky people going to the seaside; already the season was late and the hollands and cottons were deteriorating both in price and freshness. But to her they were very desirable.

Out of all the blaze and racket she turned into the narrow lanes and alleys round Paternoster Row and found herself in sudden shade, almost bewildering in its contrast, and made in a purblind fashion along the tiny pantomimic pavements, and

little winding, twisting courts to the office of *The World's Trumpet*. Mr. Hopper had invented, owned, and edited two journals, a large fat one containing a fearful amount of acknowledged cuttings from other magazines, and whole slices out of biographies and novels in the name of "reviews" and a small thin journal called *Broken Lights*, containing again clipped reprints from the other paper, like a servant dressed in her mistress's things cut down and patched. He had a great mission to the world, and he accomplished this chiefly by siding with his country's enemies on all occasions, supporting hotly all aspects of public movements that other people had not thought of, and violently declaiming against persons in authority, and all successful work. But he was good-natured and had he looked after his nails better might have been tolerable if you agreed carefully with all his wildest ravings. You must do that to be borne by him at all. His shoddy and underpaid clerks said he was just off to the Continent, to look into a serious European squabble which he had decided that only he could settle; the clerks put it more discreetly, but that was the gist of their information, offered to Mary in jerks in an overcrowded and impossibly stuffy little room, where everybody fell over everybody else and the stacks of dirty papers, and the poor typist's shabby old machine. They knew Mary: she had reported for them before, and they recollected her gentle manner and unassuming ways; and dirty and muddling as they were, poor souls, they instinctively recognised genuine dignity, and rather liked it than otherwise. They had so much of the other thing to deal with.

Mr. Hopper was a large-faced, blank-looking man, who had so long ago gone in for a "fine head," that apparently he had had no time to consider the chin part of it. He certainly had a splendid head of curly grey hair worn long, and a good flamboyant Roman profile, but what should have been a chin had duplicated itself into a great number of undulating rolls falling back unreservedly from the large full mouth and big teeth, into the *négligé tie* that the great man always affected. His collar had the appearance of catching up the receding folds and girding them just in time.

He greeted Mary cheerfully.

"Ah! Ha! Hah! Heh! So! Well, and what do we want? Ah? What is it?"

Mary briefly stated her errand and her hopes for more reporting. Mr. Hopper was quite kind.

"Certainly, of course, when we return, when we return, yes. But we go off to-morrow—you've heard—of course?—to settle this vast dispute amongst the peoples and the races of the world. A great mission, Mrs. Fresne, a mighty crusade! Oh, that my fellowmen would join hands in the mighty name of harmony and all the world be one! That is what we want—the brotherhood, the oneness of man: no more cruelties, no more war, no more oppression, no more slavery, no more sweating, no more tyranny, but a great wide, immeasurable co-equal human oneness!"

As Mr. Hopper waved and raved Mary wondered vaguely whether he was not beginning the practical realisation of his gospel by putting five sorrowful clerks in an office only big enough for one. Physically the universal oneness of the poor men and the boy at the other side of the shabby red baize door was certainly marked when they all fell in a heap over the typist, but spiritually it was quite otherwise.

"The whole world is accursed," went on Mr. Hopper, banging his table with a grey marble letter-weight like a tombstone, "by the greed of capitalists, by traditional wrongs, by hideous oppressions reared and fostered by our rotten social system. No man ought to have more than three hundred a year! No man! I would tear down from their high places these monsters of capital who fatten on our hard-wrought earnings. I would make it a criminal offence to be a capitalist. I would show no mercy. I would consign to their just doom all miserable caricatures of humanity who dare to use the accursed folly of a title! A handle to their name, forsooth! Look at me—do I need a title? Calvin Hopper, plain, honest Calvin Hopper: isn't the name known all over the globe? Down with all titles but the honest name of a great and honest man. I am for a clearing out, a great reform. My aim is ultimate harmony. Oh, that men would understand and be wise!"

Mary reflected again that the harmony would have to be very ultimate indeed if you began it by treating all capitalists as criminals and putting the titled aristocracy in prison, but again she kept wise silence. Mr. Hopper began again, and

raved on for several minutes. He considered he was giving Mary a gratuitous treat. He was known as a brilliant talker, and journalists said he "scintillated wit and wisdom"; naturally it would be an unbounded intellectual treat to this young aspirant to the ranks of letters to hear so much of his wisdom at first-hand. So he kindly expanded.

Then, hearing St. Paul's clock boom out the hour of four, and realising that Europe lay awaiting his inspired intervention, he came to business, less on Mary's account than Europe's.

"Well, so you say you've left your secretaryship? And you want to do some more scribbling as before?"

"Yes, if I can. I had the pleasure of doing quite a large amount for you last spring."

"Yes, I recollect. You worked up all Lady Jiberene's charities and philanthropic work amongst other things. I suppose you could do some more in that way?"

Mary paused. "Yes, certainly that sort of thing. Unfortunately Lady Jiberene herself and I have—I have reason to feel less friendly with Lady Jiberene than before. People have had difficulties. I am very sorry myself——"

Mr. Hopper interrupted excitedly—

"Difficulties? Difficulties! With Lady Jiberene? My dear young friend, this sort of thing will not do at all! I thought you and she were such great allies—that was why I found your work so useful. These people have power, influence; they can always get an audience. You surely do not mean to tell me that you are beginning your literary career by quarrelling with the powerful? Sir Thomas Jiberene has enormous wealth, and his wife is such a well-known society philanthropist that they are bound to be a great acquisition to the cause. We cannot afford to lose such henchmen as these!"

"But I thought you were going to put them in prison?" Mary thought, though she had more wit than to say it. She merely bowed and said, "I have not quarrelled with the lady you mention. I only say that I have had difficulties through the mischief-making of others. But there are other fields of work that I might do for you, surely, besides her charitable schemes?"

"Oh, there are others, yes, but there are also, my good lady, others to do them. Your intimacy with Lady Jiberene made your work of value to me—put us on an excellent footing with

her. She has already done much for the cause. She is a disciple of harmony—one of our best. (“They need them at the Hoyden,” thought poor Mary.) Unless you can see your way to getting ‘in’ with her again, I must, I fear, look twice at your offer. Those charming reunions she gives occasionally to the leaders of the higher harmony are world-famous—I myself have been the guest of the evening, the honoured guest in those splendid salons of hers. Ah, such meetings of brains and talent! We hope for much more from her generosity and social influence before very long. However, when I return I will see what I can offer—I will see!”

Mary rose, unable to resist a proud movement of her head at this tardy semi-promise.

“I quite understand,” said she.

Mr. Hopper seemed quite undisturbed by her look and tone.

“Everything must wait,” he said, “till the return of the autumn. There is a great exodus from town—all going on our holidays, eh? Not I—I go, I fly to the service of my brother-man. But every one is rushing away, away to revel in the fair fields and sunny seas—ah, what a spectacle! London emptying—London emptying. What a sight! What a marvel! Doubtless you go too; we all go, all of us, miraculously fired with that one grand human instinct—the return to Nature!”

Mr. Hopper’s own return to nature, human nature, and a very ugly phase of it, had followed so rapidly on his mood of exalted prophethood that Mary felt chilled as she passed out from the Presence, and through the insanitary outer office, where the principles of oneness was being developed by two clerks trying to use an uncomfortable single desk at the same time, and saying rather unnerving things to one another in consequence. She bade them all good-afternoon, and went home very sadly, a little wiser and more enlightened as to her old literary friend.

She realised the truth of his words as she passed through the streets and studied the thinned crowds; certainly every one was intent on holiday-making, and already the people in Oxford Street were beginning to show signs of being different to the habitual frequenters of that thoroughfare. There was already a vague foreign look about many of them, or a country look, or a wandering, respectable nomad look that she recognised as an August sign. Even the milliners’ windows had taken on a

different appearance, and the hats offered for sale were distinguished by a certain frumpiness and excess of check ribbon and tartan ribbon and gauze veil, likely to appeal to the passing eye of young America visiting out of the season.

Of course she could have no holiday. That was undreamed of. But suddenly it occurred to her that Cartyn would shortly be going for his; of course he must—it must now be quite due. In a church like his no doubt the vicar took August for his vacation and possibly September too. Her heart sank at the thought. What a waste of weeks here in this hot, airless London, without his inspiring presence! Even when she did not see him there was always the fact, the consciousness of his protecting friendship, and even that would be gone. She remembered now that the deaconess had once told her that the vicar went “abroad” for his vacation, like Mr. Hopper, only not so professedly for his brother-man as for a change of scene.

When she got home she found a note awaiting her asking her to repeat their walk of that other evening; she was to meet him at Kew Station and go into the gardens for an hour or so. She could have cried at the kind thought, but she laughed instead. What a respite! Even if he were going away there was to be another meeting after all.

But she knew this sort of thing could not go on.

“I may do him as much harm by being seen about with him in this fashion, as by marrying him,” she said. “I must put an end to it all. It isn’t fair to either of us.”

A bit of luck, so-called, in her own affairs, finally decided her. There was a woman sub-editor of a small halfpenny journal, whom she had known in the old days of Mr. Calvin Hopper’s patronage. To her she now applied with one or two small articles on matters of home interest.

Mary’s rather dashing, impulsive fashion of writing and stringing her facts together told in her favour, and her literary friend was found not unwilling to take these contributions at the rate of a very few shillings each. But this gave her a new determination and new hope. She would go away, she said, and work and work and perhaps some day, who knows?—earn a name for herself, a fresh, proud name as a writer that no one should dare to dispute. They were forlorn beginnings, but one never knows, of course. One thing was certain—she

must remove the burden of herself from Cartyn's shoulders, the incubus of her misfortune from the least chance of harming his work or career.

They had many more of those walks, and then came one in late September which she knew only too well was to be their last meeting, though he did not. They went to Kew, though the wind blew chill east up the river, and the leaves coming off the trees and rotting, sodden, in masses under their feet. They stood a long time on the tow path, and watched the early sunset flame red-gold and lurid, under a murky pall of drab mist behind the hard, flat bulk of Sion House. Mary, her own heart heavy and full, noticed with painful exactitude every detail of that scene, the river racing along, mud-coloured and angry in the looming light, the harsh rustle of the withered rushes on the opposite marshy shore, and across the flats that straightfaced, prison-like pile with the great lion at the top standing out black against the sky, with his abnormally long, straight, impossible tail. It was an evening big with fate, ominous with coming sorrow. When it was over they had come home saddened and silent, though still only one of them knew of the parting. At the station she lingered perhaps a moment longer when he held her hand for goodbye; perhaps her white face looked like an appeal to him under the flickering station light as she turned it to his despairingly. At any rate, he suddenly stooped and kissed her, and his doing so seemed quite natural to them both, natural and sweet and sacred. And then they separated without a word.

That evening, when a mist was closing in, and rather later than usual, she came in from her walk, her landlady, who appeared to be very busy shutting a window on the stairs that was never by any chance opened, said tentatively as she passed—

"The vicar hasn't had no holiday, Mrs. Fresne. People are wondering when he'll go. I wonder why it is—don't you? I said I'd ask you?"

Mary looked back at her impudent questioner, taking in the whole picture of her frowsy hair, the peering shifty eyes, the manner at once half-saucy and half-nervous, with a sudden revelation of the truth of her suspicions as to the parish "talk ing."

"People should ask the vicar themselves, Mrs. Hunt," she

said coldly. "How should I know about the future movements of the clergy?"

"Still——" began Mrs. Hunt; but Mary's glance silenced her, and she tramped away to her own regions.

An hour later her lodger called her up to speak to her. A little tremblingly she went. Mrs. Fresne's eyes, even in the dim light of the one oil lamp, looked red and swollen.

"I wanted to say that I shall not keep these rooms much longer, Mrs. Hunt," she said. "I have been very comfortable here—but I am going away."

"For a holiday, *mim*?" said the landlady.

"Yes," said Mary, very quaveringly, "for a holiday. A very, very long one."

Cartyn did not see her again. But when a letter to her received no answer, he called one day at Loder Street, risking parochial comment in the terrible fear that she was ill. Mrs. Hunt gave him a sealed note.

"She's gone," she said laconically. "I was to hand you this, sir."

"Gone?" His voice told his incredulous amazement. "Gone? Gone where?"

"Don't know, sir. Five days ago she went—left here for good," said the woman. "I was to give you that. She left no address. I haven't an idea where she's gone. Well, she was a quiet, well-behaved sort of a young person, I *will* say though they *do* say as how she was a real lady in hiding. She'd quieter ways than the real ladies I've seen myself—she——"

"Mrs. Fresne has left your rooms?"

"Yes, sir, and——"

But Cartyn had gone, torn off anywhere, away from the garrulous tongue and prying eyes. Gone? He tore open his letter as he strode along. Only a few words—very gentle and to the point. He was not to try to follow her. She was going away to work out a better, braver name for herself. She had got good literary work, and she meant to stick to that, and perhaps make a name at it—who knew? She added: "Good-bye now, but we will hope not for ever. God is watching, and all may yet be well."

An enclosure fell out—the half of the letter she had found in the ivory box. She wrote: "I found this amongst some

papers of my husband's. I send it to you to show you that I know now who my enemy was. We need say no more about it, except that I now fully understand your noble action. You could not have done otherwise." He hardly glanced at the wretched fragment. Mary was gone. He had lost her! She was gone out of his reach away and away, to suffer by herself without him. "Oh, my darling!" he cried in his heart, in an anguish at the thought. He was like a man gone mad. He pushed on blindly now through the crowds hurrying along in the cold, foggy afternoon, trying to hit on one sane idea in all the rushing tumult of his thoughts, one reasonable plan of immediate action. She should not escape him so. Literary work? Mr. Hooper—the Hoydens? Some one there would surely know! He would apply to them all and find her at whatever cost. He did not wait a second. He hailed a passing cab, and tore off to Paternoster Row, and the office of *The World's Turmpet*.

But *The World's Trumpet* was not a world's directory. It did not know any address of that lady save 8 Loder Street. No. The principle of universal oneness was again exemplified in Mr. Hopper's clerks, who now at least were all united in staring open-mouthed and a little cynically at the curt-voiced, excited, white-faced clergyman. Mr. Hopper was not back in town yet. No, Europe had not yet been able to do without him. The sub-editor, or acting editor, might be asked. They tapped at the inner rabbit-hutch and a long face with a long straight, light fringe, long moustaches, long pen in one ear, and large spectacles immediately appeared in the crack, as though the acting editor had been sitting with his nose nearly in it, as indeed, by the exigencies of his tiny space, he had. "A reporter?—Mrs. Fresne? No, never seen her since the summer. Heard nothing of her. No, not writing for us." The dirty baize door flopped to again, and the grubby editorial vision, so briefly vouchsafed, was no more.

Cartyn dashed back to the west and openly stormed the Hoyden Club. He asked for Miss Hyde, but was informed she was away at present. He could not recollect any of the other names of those who had been her friends, and after the most searching inquiries got no satisfaction. The only address they knew was Loder Street, as he half expected.

In despair he came outside and stood on the kerb staring at the light splashed on the fog. He took out the letter, and with it Florence's condemnation. Then an idea seized him making him feel ridiculously angry with himself for not having thought of it before—Messrs. Tallard & Tallard, her lawyers. Suddenly, at the idea, his brain whirled, caught up and carried away in a vortex of mad suggestion, and he got into his cab again and drove to Whitehall.

He was waited upon by the courteous clerk, and, upon his making certain statements written in pencil on a card and sealed in an envelope, promised an interview with the head of the firm. He got it. Half an hour later he emerged from those ominous portals. His face was white and drawn and set. He made his way homeward like a man dreaming. It never seemed to occur to him to ride. He walked the whole way from Whitehall to Kensington, through the muddy night streets, always with that mask-face and those hard eyes set on an innermost thought of utter horror.

Angels have fallen—and men?

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Cartyn left the lawyer's offices, he had no clear idea of his surroundings or his destination, and it never so much as occurred to him to take a cab or 'bus, though the evening was wretched and the crowds pushing. People wending their own way home from work or business on a sloppy November night are not over-punctilious about the exact degree with which they may jostle a brooding, white-faced, lost-looking parson who may chance to be going in their direction. Cartyn's own pace was a rapid, eager stride, and he arrived home at his gloomy vicarage overheated, dazed, and silent.

He took up his letters in the hall mechanically, and asked his man if there were any messages in his usual fashion, and, receiving these, flung himself as he was, wet overcoat and all, into his study and closed and locked the door. He sat there at his table with his head in his hands for a long time, so long that the man came knocking to announce that supper was ready, and then he recollected where he was, and the steam rising from his damp overcoat became for the first time apparent to his vague eyes. He got up at the man's insistence and followed him indifferently into the dining-room, leaving the wet coat in the hall, but when he reached the meal he only stood still and stared at it as though trying to focus enough attention upon it to find out quite what it was. In this there may have been excuse, since even the vicarage cook could hardly have given a full account of the antecedents of the gravied hash she had put before her master, though certainly that was not his reason in contemplating it. Like so many bachelor meals, unless the bachelor is an old woman, this repast was not thrilling in its inviting capacities; things that ought to have been watery were dry and things of a nature dry were too watery. The potatoes and the mustard and the hash had far too much water in them, but the water-jug was only half full, and the spinach and the salad were positively arid and brittle. There was also

that other universal characteristic of such forlorn banquets—a plethora of salt-cellars and dessertspoons, but an arid scarcity of tablespoons or anything to serve vegetables with. But these matters did not strike the master; perhaps he was too used to them. In any case he only gazed upon them abstractedly for a few seconds and then turned on his heel and strode back into his study, saying he did not want any supper; he would have a pipe instead. He had to say something to shut the gaping mouth of his dismayed and offended servitor, who after arguing a little, proceeded with real dudgeon to find the ugly blackened thing his master smoked and the tobacco jar and the tray, and set them with deeply offended dignity on his writing-table.

When he had gone Cartyn picked up these things and lighted his pipe in a perfectly instinctive fashion, and with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets paced to and fro about his room. He never once raised his eyes from the ground, lost utterly in stern reverie. Hour after hour passed by, and still he tramped the room.

He reached up to the shelf of an oak cupboard and rummaged about for a few moments in its rather untidy recesses, until he came across a loose handful of photographs tossed anyhow into a box, rather banal-looking things, of a lot of fatuous-faced lads in college gowns, or cricketing flannels, or boating kit, with here and there amongst them the thin face of an eager-looking, ugly-looking for the most part—shyness has that effect on Englishmen—that thin long-jawed face poked its characteristic way out pretty constantly, its rather shining determined eyes fixed uncompromisingly on the spectator, or, as would really be the case, on the photographer.

“You’re dead,” he said, looking down at it, his pipe still stuck between his teeth. “You’ll never live again. You’re buried now, for all time. You had a job lot of utterly unworkable ideas about honour and heroism, if I remember rightly. You got some of ’em from Macaulay’s *Lays of Ancient Rome*, and some from ’varsity tradition, and some were in your blood. You were going to convert the world. It was a nice, comfortable straight-dealing sort of world, waiting to be converted. The only reason it hadn’t got well hitherto was because the very certain remedies of a very certain school of the church had not been properly applied till *you* came into it. When you

had dipped into a little theology, seen life in a few vacations, and the lower classes as collected together decorously for a Crystal Palace Band of Hope fête, you saw your way to the conversion of England quite clearly. It really only needed a few quotations from the Fathers, didn't it? And a little inspiring controversy over degrees of church ornament, and the thing was practically done. Enemies, atheists?—quote Sir Oliver Lodge and Professor Drummond and Newman (in his twenties), and St. Augustine and the E.C.U. They would then be disposed of. Worldings!—that awful, idiotic word!—go neatly to the neighbouring landlord or Member of Parliament and tell them that their riches were dross and their glory a dream—(they would probably agree with you, especially the Member of Parliament)—and so the grasping, selfish, capitalist classes would fall to your bow or spear. Women?—Oh, preach down to them: speak thoughtfully and kindly on matters suited to their poorer intelligences, or exact strict obedience from creatures hardly capable of steady intellectual effort: that perhaps would serve one's purpose better. Oh dear, yes, it was all going to be very simple. After 'varsity there was that rippingly fine curacy, when cold baths at five o'clock in the morning were an integral part of the mission to England: so was the constant and light-hearted missing of food, regarded as a discipline, and the rushing off madly to every possible meeting, service, ceremony, or imaginary duty connected with the great work. Then you did sometimes get a sort of sense, didn't you? of a dead-wall somewhere rearing itself just when you were feeling most fervent: an impassioned exposition of the Athanasian Creed addressed to a Sunday-school on a hot afternoon, when the teachers were clearly criticising each others' hats, and the children seemed to prefer surreptitious peppermints and kicking each others' shins to anything fervid you had to offer? That blank wall occurred often—much oftener than the instant conversion of Members of Parliament, or the reduction of ladies of poor intellect to absolute obedience. It cropped up so frequently that one had to think of a reason why it was there at all. Well, the reason soon came, a fine old reason that has stood the test of centuries of religious endeavour for men without count,—the fault of the insensate flock: just that—if you won't listen to me you must be utterly beyond all remedy! That conviction

brought great comfort. After all, there was a large part of the world entirely beyond remedy (if not listening to me counts as a definition, and it generally does), and you soon got used to the idea, didn't you, and wrote off from your list of convertibles those who remained aloof to your propaganda. After a time the result was wonderful lightness of heart. Calling the just to repentance is, after all, a very pleasant and jog-trot thing, and with that you were most happily occupied for years. In the slums, coal-tickets brought them, and in the west, custom. And you yourself were always the head, always the light and the leader. Surely the conscience was most happy—entirely untroubled? Far and away beyond the pale there were beings who lied and stole and fought and betrayed, but they hardly counted. If it was dreadfully heretical and wicked for a member of the flock to go and hear a preacher credited with leanings towards the higher criticism, how could one concern oneself with sins of the magnitude of never coming to church at all, and playing bridge on Sundays? There really was not time. A busy general practitioner, occupied by doctoring up exhausted nerves, has hardly time to fly to the battlefield and deal with shattered limbs. It may even not be his duty. So those bigger things were not your duty. The doctor might one day come in for a shattered limb himself, which would at least rouse his belief in mere accidents. You?—ah, you have got your shattered limb at last! You have fallen beyond the wildest crash of the higher criticism heretic! You have learned that failings must be reckoned with by your own utter failure!"

He seized the last photograph—the thin-faced boy taken in a surplice and deacon's stole, his mortar-board cap still in his hand, and tore it in half, throwing the bits into the fire, and digging them into the coals with his boot-heel. When he did so, he looked exactly like the boy.

"That's the end of you," he said, and tossing the other groups carelessly back into the cupboard he went back and resumed his pacing.

He took Mary's heartbroken little letter out of his pocket again, and read it once more, though he knew it by heart already, almost as though he had hoped to find a new meaning in it. But there was none, save the infinitely new meanings that

love will always find in all things written or said by the beloved. beloved.

Why had she gone? Why had she said nothing to him, hinted nothing about it? They had driven her away amongst them, he by his love and hesitancy as to whether it would be wise to fly in the face of all his petty clerical traditions and marry her whether she would or not, the others by their hateful gossip and jealousy. He ran his boot with an angry kick against the table leg as he passed, at the thought which came to him, that if he could find her now she should marry him whatever the consequences. Was she for ever to fall between the claims of others' expediency. Florence's moral cowardice, even Mrs. Holden's matchmaking designs—she had had to suffer for them all.

Well, it had driven him to-day to despairing action. He had to-day learnt the entire measure of his own weakness, and the effect was shattering to all his long-lived self-complacencies. It was no idle fancy that made him throw his photograph of the sunny, complacent young deacon on to the fire; the symbolism was as real to him in that dark, horrible moment as any act of his life had ever been. To-day—to-night—he deliberately detached himself from the high seat of his own self-esteem and came down to sit with the beggars and the outcasts of the world; henceforth to be a sinner amongst sinners, a perfectly hopeless human creature amongst his fellow-humans, not a distant saint niched in his own prejudices, and looking down scornfully upon sins whose profounder meanings he may never fathom. It is a great thing to be above the rest of creation, serene in your own inaccessibility. Nevertheless, the bubble that floats upon the surface of the stream may feel the same superiority to the busy minnows beneath, to the waving water-weeds, or the cobbled polished stones, things that are lower in point of situation, but which have a far higher work to do than it. He made this simile to himself with a laugh of bitter self-contempt. It is a shattering thing to discover, after regarding yourself as exceedingly sensible for a long time, that you are after all frightfully conceited, especially when the incident that so opens your eyes is a crashing moral descent. But it may be your only chance of rising.

When he had tired himself out utterly with walking about—he

must have accomplished some miles of walking since that memorable interview at the lawyers—he sat down at last, wearied out, and leaned his chin upon his hands. His tired eyes rested on the triptysch that Florence had sent him, months ago, her penitential offering that he had then regarded with such scorn. The beautiful thing caught the light from his lamp, and the red glow from his now fast-declining fire burned on the silver of the nails, and the small garnet blood-drops with which its realism was almost painfully completed. It no longer stirred in him that ancient feeling of wrathful pity, even though he at the moment fully recalled the train of circumstances that had brought it into his possession.

“Suppose,” he said, “it is superstitious, offered as a substitute for a just action, wasn’t it given in a pathetic yearning after a better idealism, which, blind enough, is better than indifference? Poor wretch, she didn’t know herself. But neither have I known myself. Look upon us,” he said, gazing reverently now at the drooping figure with those gleaming garnet drops; “who know not what we do.”

He paused a moment. “When that thing came,” he went on, “I recollect that I was indignant that a woman could be superstitious enough to offer it while retaining a lie on her soul. I prayed to know the root of the evil which made such a thing possible. Now I’ve got my answer.

“We and our hollow formalism—we inhuman, theoretical parsons, with our little empty rules and notions, busy counting our anise and cummin, a little here and a little there, and forgetting the great tragedy of human experience!

“We physicians with an intricate collection of tabulated remedies—and no knowledge of the disease. Content for less than a phrase and a candle—for a university tradition or a parochial tenet—to leave unexplored the vastest mystery of God’s creation, the human soul in daily working!”

He violently pushed aside a heap of books scattered about on his table, serious-looking volumes—Sturt on *The Parables*, a work which when you opened it appeared to be composed mainly of collections of Roman figures, strung together on chains of heavy comment; Clamp on *The Catacombs*; Grudge on *The Analysis of Controversy*; Wriggle on *The Recapitulation of the Rubrics*; and a Bible that only opened at St. Paul.

He sat staring into the gloom of his large partially lighted room, and he remained so for a very long time, so long that the sound of the hall clock striking half-past eleven and reverberating through the silent house now roused him at last from his long watch and travail.

He turned with a sigh to his papers. There were certain things he must do that night, whatever sin or sorrow lay on his heart, certain letters to be answered, appointments to be made, business to settle. He had lost a whole afternoon and evening, and he laughed shortly as he recollected it because it seemed to him that he had lost years—and he must make up for some of it before the last post went out. He turned to his heap of letters and sorted them out according to date. There was one from a man he knew or had known slightly, that certainly required some sort of an answer, for he had put it aside in a hopeless puzzle as to what to do respecting it at least two days ago. The poor, weak wretch, an old college compeer, hardly so much as even a boyish friend, had entered the Church at the same time as Cartyn had done: they had been ordained by the same bishop, and had got their respective "titles" at about the same time, Cartyn to the East End, this man to a suburban church of some celebrity. Some years later he had got himself mixed up in some folly, partly through a certain flippancy of character never balanced by the advantages of trouble or difficulty, great baptisms which a ridiculously prosperous home and parentage had unfortunately denied him. Cartyn had heard something about it in the chance gossip that occasionally draws together men who have been at the same college, but for years he had lost sight of this man and had forgotten his sordid little episode completely in the interest of his own affairs.

But here was a letter from him written from some desperate address in impossible wilds of north London; a ruined man's letter, the last cry of a creature whose head is sinking under the billows of its own misery and the world's vengeance. He told how his patrimony had gone long ago, this not through his own fault, indeed, but lost through his parents' unlucky speculations; how he was married to a young and delicate wife, and they had lost their little child; how, through the kindness of friends, he had managed to find a trifling secretarial post.

after the exposure of his folly, and had managed on that easily enough until his money became absorbed in his family's general ruin. And how his work did not bring him in a living wage.

What he wrote to ask was Cartyn's recommendation, his moral support, in his bitterly serious attempt to return to his priestly and parochial duties. He had had almost an offer of a country curacy, and the bishop's sanction to return to his old life, but now that old tale of his past cropped up and cut him off from hope at every turn.

"My wife is ill, pining for the country air," he wrote. "We are reduced to living in one room, for which we can barely pay: this new chance may mean life to her. I would not approach you on a matter so personal but for her sake. I implore you, in her name, to help me to rise out of the despair my fault has brought me to."

In the morning that letter, thrilling, ghastly, horrible as much in what it did not say as in what it did, had presented confusing difficulties to the man to whom it was written, because it seemed to him that he was practically asked to give a false testimonial in order to do a kindness. His old acquaintance gave the name of the country vicar who was willing to take him on as his curate, and implored Cartyn to write to him on his behalf, say something, anything, to bring the possibility of that bare subsistence, and that reviving country air nearer to him and his pitiful little wife. It was a cry for mercy from a creature who had forfeited all claim to it by his own fault, and as such, in the clearer morning hours, Cartyn had sternly regarded it, feeling that a horrible duty lay before him in having to refuse, or at best discourage the poor man's claim. But now all was changed. He recalled the "fault" to which his suppliant alluded. It amounted to little more than the scandalising of a pitifully poor and censorious neighbourhood by an episode rather foolish and self-destructive than anything intrinsically evil. What was it to his own fault? Good heavens! How the one suffered and the other got off scot-free! This poor semi-ruined man appealing from his wretched lodgings to him, the powerful vicar of a celebrated church, a man with untold influence in his hands, and yet, as he said straightly to himself that night, the worse sinner of the two by far and far away.

He set to work now to write the letter, showing his new mood

in every turn of his sentences, every expression of sympathy and his desire to help. "I will come and see you," he wrote, "to-morrow, and talk over what you propose. All being well, I will not undertake to write a testimonial to (he mentioned the country vicar) but will myself go down to Chadhurst to see him. I think that should put things on a better basis, and save any awkwardness. Pens and ink are tricky things when so much is at stake." He sealed up the kindly note that was to bring almost delirious happiness to the hopeless creature who had appealed to him, and stamped it ready for post.

"That must go to-night in any case," he said.

He could easily manage an hour or two to go down and see the vicar of Chadhurst. Personally he could plead his friend's cause, he could tell the real story, plead so eloquently, that if the man had a human heart he would see the thing as he saw it, "though not quite," he said grimly. "Not from the standpoint of one who might one day be in the same condemnation!"

He wrote one or two other notes, one to the vicar in question, making an appointment, and then went out himself to post them. The pillar-box was a little way up the street, and he strode up towards it, relieved to get his lungs filled again with the fresher night air, that smokeless, still atmosphere that makes London streets so wonderfully invigorating and almost pleasant after eleven o'clock at night, when most of the fires are out, and the real quality of the much abused city atmosphere has a chance to assert itself. He put his letters in the pillar-box and turned to retrace his steps. Out of the deep shadows, cast by a row of immense houses he saw the figure of a policeman loom forward on silent, rubber-padded boots. He called out "good-night" to the man, who seemed disposed to stop for the luxury of a chat in the weary monotony of his night round, and to whom the vicar of St. Chad's was a very familiar figure. Cartyn lingered a moment talking abstractedly of the weather and the chances for the morrow, and as he did so a figure passed, a thin, slinking, slouching form keeping in the shadow as closely as possible, and purposely crossing the street to avoid the eye of the policeman as far as was possible.

"There's a well-known customer," said the constable, indicating the poor wraith with a lordly jerk of his head.

"Is he? In what way?" asked Cartyn.

"All ways," said the laconic official. "Tramps all over this beat and lots of others. Takes milk-cans, chiefly, and sometimes door handles and bell fittings. Oh, anything detachable, or anything in an area—from a pot o' musk to a ten-guinea puppy dog. We've got to keep an eye on him. He's all the more slippery because—asking your pardon, mister—he's a born'd gentleman."

"A gentleman—that? Good heavens, how do you know?"

"Oh, we've got his pedigree, don't you make any mistake—all of it."

"But how did he get down to this?"

"Oh, drink, mainly, I expect; but he began by cheating at cards. That's how he began. He was turned out of his regiment for that—he was a horficer. I expect that gave him the start."

"Poor creature!" said Cartyn. He bade the man good-night, because just then he could not listen to any more. Cheating at cards! A moment's obsession, a moment's temptation, a mean fall, but a final one! A mere matter of conventional dishonesty, the breaking of a code of rules framed by men who would themselves recognise no obligation that a man should suffer for a wrong done to a woman—and yet this frightful, tragic doom!

He had nearly reached his vicarage door, that correct ecclesiastical emblem, when that overwhelming sense of fellow-feeling and pity made him turn suddenly on his heel and retrace his steps in the direction of the pillar-box. The policeman had already sauntered on, and had disappeared down a side turning where he was busy flashing his lantern on to people's windows and areas in search of negligence. Cartyn hurried along the way where he had seen the outcast go slinking—it was a long, straight road, and there under the flicker of occasional lamps he saw it still pursuing its dreary, aimless, stealthy way. He had almost to run to get within touch of it, so much terror had the mere sound of his pushing footsteps struck into the guilty creature, causing him to hurry even as he felt himself followed. But broken boots and hopeless rheumatism do not make for speed, and Cartyn caught up his prey and put a silver coin into his hand before he could altogether make his escape. The nameless thing hardly did more than grunt.

"For Christ's sake," said Cartyn.

"Christ bless you," said the spectre indistinctly.

Cartyn stood with his hands thrust deep into his overcoat pockets, his hat rammed over his eyes, and watched the outcast lollop miserably away.

"He has," he said grimly. "I now know I'm a cad. That's better than gibbering mock sanctity."

CHAPTER XVI

"I do think England," said Mrs. Courtman, "is the most disgusting, impossible place on the globe."

The hot, stifling August and September were succeeded by a grey and misty October, heavy on the spirits with moist heat and treacherous evening "rokes" that made winding sheets over the all too early sunsets that now began to shorten the days, and Mrs. Courtman was trying to get braced up in a Scottish country house. She usually spent all the forenoon that she was up and dressed by a charming log-fire in a cosy morning-room snarling over her letters, and great parts of the afternoon driving in a closed brougham with two dogs; but she was really angry that she was not braced, and had said so many nasty things to her hostess about the fraudulent quality of Scottish moorland air, that this scathing attack on England quite revived that Gaelic lady into sudden curiosity.

"Well," she replied, "it's quite a change to hear you say so. But why?" Florence had at the moment just got to the letter stage.

"Everybody is so shocked," she said, angrily tossing aside a long and closely written missive.

"Why, but we've got the name for that here," said the other lady. "Didn't you say so yourself? Many's the time, my dear, that I've heard that."

"Oh yes, goodness knows you are," said Florence. "Very shocked, you Scotch. But I must say you keep it for the kirk and the black kid gloves, and drop it more or less in between, which is nice of you, and gives you canny, kindly sort of faces that I like. But in England they are shocked in season and out of season. It pulls down their faces into solemn fiddles, as though they were always saying the word 'shock' very long and chantingly. Oh, just pull down your own nice, rosy, sonsie face and try it—there!—doesn't that feel just like the average English matron on her good behaviour? I tell you hundreds of women

are daily hunting for some thing or person to upset their notions of propriety. I really don't think I'll ever go back. I'll sell Darnley Gardens, and live away somewhere in peace."

"Then wouldn't they hunt ye out," said her friend, "if they love it so——?" The quaint irresistible "ye" robbed the inference of its sting. Florence laughed shortly.

"They wouldn't need," she said. "They've got plenty to keep them occupied at home—the neighbour's Louis heels, the maid's fringe, the fact that you have (or haven't) read a certain book, the planning out of somebody's income that doesn't go round and yet he won't go bankrupt. I've often known people more shocked because you aren't bankrupt than because you are. I suppose it *is* disappointing when one has settled it in one's mind. Well, as I was saying, I've had a wretched letter this morning that brings back all these dreary things to my otherwise happy mind. I told you I'd been unlucky for ages, but I really did lose a lot of my bothers on that Algerian trip; yet, look you, directly I got back to the British Isles, I'm asked to settle a ladies' club dispute! Here's a letter from that old Lady Jiberene!"

"Oh, I know her. She's a great club woman, isn't she?"

"She is. Quarreling with all of them makes you tremendously celebrated. Look at this rigmarole going into every single detail of the wretched squabble—as if I cared! I've only been to the Hoydens once, just to please that tiresome old Harriet Jacques, and now I'm supposed to read through all this!"

"But at what is she shocked?"

"Oh, at all the other members."

"That's generally a reason for remaining on a woman's club list, I've heard. Some folks join for nothing else."

"Oh well, yes, it amuses them, no doubt. This woman belongs to two others; the 'smart' kind, you know, where they admit they steal hairpins and bits of soap and plated forks; she stays on for the pure excitement of the thing. But this affair—the Hoydens—appears to have been too much even for her!"

"But why does she write to you?"

"Oh well, because I know the secretary—a woman I knew in India years ago." Mrs. Courtman's eyes flickered and fell, and she called suddenly to her dogs in a sharpened voice.

"And has this body been doing anything, then?" said Mrs. Mackie, in her pretty treble brogue.

"I haven't read. I won't read it. I began, but it's such a rave I shan't finish it." She threw the letter into a little inlaid desk where she kept such loose papers, and turned the small golden key fiercely. "I wish these ambitious women wouldn't run after me so patently. I've no interest at all in this Lady Jiberene. I don't think I shall answer it at all."

"Oh, think it over," said the peaceful hostess, working away at her "woolies" with unruffled brow. "Some puir body may be saved from trouble by a kind word from you."

But Florence refused to do anything at the moment but talk liltng nonsense to her dogs, and sweep over the morning papers, reading only the society "paragraphs" and running down, at intervals, every celebrity who had done, or was going to do anything at all. This she did as a mere matter of form; many women so read the papers.

Parties, marriages, births, deaths, called for exactly similar strictures, made quite impartially and with a buoyant absence at once of accuracy, respect, or the least enmity. It was a mere formula.

For several days she went about taking no further note of Lady Jiberene's letter locked away in that untidy desk, and completely forgetting it. There were one or two other people staying at the Gordon Mackies, one an amateur aeronaut, making experiments in ballooning, and whenever the mists lifted, inducing the reckless party to embark with him for short trips across a field or two. Into this new excitement, where you really stood a splendid chance of breaking your neck, unequalled even by racing motors or pyramid climbing, the lazy Florence had feverishly plunged, forsaking the log-fire and the shut brougham for the top of a windy hill and these dangers. Anything to be "in the swim," anything to be more absurd and startling than other people.

But one afternoon a week later when she was again lounging about doing nothing, the mists having made ballooning an impossibility, Mrs. Mackie said in perfectly unruffled tones, "And pray what happened to that puir body who stole the soap?"

"Stole the soap? Who stole—what soap?" said Mrs. Courtman, staring at her not unnaturally.

"Why, at the ladies' club. Wasn't there some one who got into trouble with Lady Jiberene, you said? And didn't you say it was soap? Or hairpins? Eh? Or forks?"

"Nonsense," said Florence. "Of course I didn't! I don't even know what did happen." She sent for the little desk and rummaged in it wildly, jerking out Lady Jiberene's letter, and skimming over the first part with many a snort of contemptuous disgust. Then she got to the latter half, up to then unread.

"Oh, they've dismissed her!" she said, sitting up suddenly, her voice sharp and surprise.

"What for?"

"I'll see. Yes, here. Oh, because some one—what?—son—some one made some unpleasant charge about her past, and—oh, the idiots, the wretched lunatic things, with their wicked gossip and evil minds!" She threw down the letter, and flung a book she had been holding across the room with a clatter.

"Go on," said the Scottish lady; "and what did they do?"

Florence, very red of face, picked up her letter again. There was Lady Jiberene's full account, intensely complicated by endless excuses, self-justifications, little platitudinal gushes, and some sweet moralising. But she concluded her letter by begging dear Mrs. Courtman, if she really was a friend of poor Mrs. Fresne, to set the matter right if she could. "I cannot," wrote Lady Jiberene, "get her back to the Hoydens in any case, but if I am really convinced of her innocence, I can enable her to get her living. Mr. Cartyn, the vicar of St. Chad's, has been here about it. He seems to be *deeply* interested in Mrs. Fresne. I suppose her looks would always gain her the pity of *men*. He says the story is not true—he can prove it, and something must be done without delay."

Florence's angry, flushed face had changed to a guilty white, and she sat and stared at the letter after she had read it as though in it lay her own condemnation. Into Lady Jiberene's prattling words she read another meaning. Mr. Cartyn had been there; he had said the story was not true—how much more had he said? How much more might he not say? To Florence the honour of others was as her own. Love would be an excuse for any dishonesty; had been in her own case, if by such a name she called her own jealousy. All along she had suspected Cartyn of caring for Mary, and now this letter of Lady Jiberene's

proved it; he must be bent on strong measures indeed if he would go to her about it. It only corroborated the letter she had not so long before received from him, and which was so far unanswered. Even then she only saw the whole affair from her own point of view. How cruelly *she* had been treated, how heartless the vicar's behaviour had been to *her*. How wronged she was.

She caught Mrs. Mackie that evening after a long motor drive, half an hour before they need dress for dinner, and dragged her into her room. A huge fire was burning. "Do come in and talk," she demanded hotly; "though you aren't a bit sympathetic—brutally indifferent, like all happily married women—somehow you're decent to talk to, Elspeth. I can't think why?"

"Well, well, talk. That's all you need do. Ye needn't think—that's another story;"

Florence flung herself back on a great downy lounge before the fire. "You sarcastic old cat, with your smug—I mean, canny face! There, sit down, do, and try not to look very patient. You think you know everything, because you've got a happy home, and one good man to love you, and children, and all that. But, ugh! if you knew what I do about life—and men! I know all their badness, if anybody does!"

"Oh, I don't envy ye! It's no the wrong side of any puir body that I want to see! That's no more knowledge than if a body might see only the fogs and never the moon, and then be running down the Creator for all His works!"

"Don't stroke that sealskin! If you can't be knitting you will be putting something straight—'natty,' you call it. You think you are called upon to put buttons on creation! I believe you'd like to put a fire-screen in front of the sun, and make the sea learn manners!"

"Weel, weel. It seems I can't teach this mon of yours manners, whoever he is."

"No, you can't. He's a parson."

The Scotch lady's hands went up from the sealskin coat across her knee. "A parson?"

"Yes, away in town."

"But you—and a parson! Who'd believe it."

"I know it's odd. They're quite out of date nowadays. Nobody dreams of marrying them."

"Ay, but some of them still get wives."

"Oh yes, in golf capes, with drab felt hats with one quill in them. But I was speaking of actual women, real women who live. People who know that there is a world outside the parish rooms, and coal-teas, and things."

"Weel, now, real devotion——"

"Oh yes, yes, yes! But why does it make your hair scrawny, and your nose polished, and what is there in drab that is so very pleasing to Heaven? I wish I knew. However, the man I mean isn't married. He's fickle and insincere and cruel. He has behaved shockingly. But all men are the same!"

"If that's so why fash yourself then? Put them in their place, and have done with them."

"But how?"

"Why, marry one. Then ye'll never worry your head over 'em again. A man is nothing but a great bairn. And ye'll be so busy seeing to the puir loon's comforts that ye'll leave his fooleries alone!"

This philosophy opened Florence's eyes.

"Men's comforts? Selfish wretches! Yes, that's how we suffer! We are sacrificed to them."

"Look here," said Elspeth Mackie, folding the sealskin coat and laying it neatly on the end of the couch with several pats, "I'm just tired of professional suffering women. I never heard a woman who loved say she suffered yet, though maybe mony do. If you love—and give—there is no such thing as suffering, of the howling stage-tragedy kind. It is so sweet it keeps your lips shut. Men, indeed! When I hear a bonnie woman talking about the suffering sex, I just know she's been playing tricks herself!"

Florence wriggled on her cushions, and stared into the fire. She was not offended. Like many trifling women she liked to feel the presence of sincerity even when it told her these appalling home-truths, in this chatty, broguey voice. There was a vague consolation in it.

Mrs. Mackie spoke again—

"But did ye love the mon?"

"Love? Oh well—oh, I fancied him. I liked him. I wanted him to admire me. That's what they call love nowadays. He did admire me in a sort of way. Well, he accepted my presents."

"Eh! Quite modern. Um. Yes. There's your trouble in a

nutshell, my bonnie woman. If you give the man the presents he'll never love you."

"But you said just now something about loving and giving."

"Ay, so I did. But I didn't mean presents you could buy at a shop. No man loves for those."

"Oh, you meant money?"

"No, no."

"Oneself?"

"That, but not as you mean it. Not giving him at the altar just a big, fat, cross thing, to be bought a house for, and to be deemed smarter than the neighbours, and to have servants hired for it, and friends found for it. No, I meant giving up your will and your fads and your moods and your pet hysterias—every woman's got those—and just being a jolly soul. Just loving a great bairn of a man better than yourself."

Florence looked at her. "Nobody cares for those old-fashioned ideas," she said, but tentatively.

"They haven't got a date, my honey," said the Scotchwoman placidly. "They were before the everlasting hills, and they'll live when you and I are gone."

Right in the middle of this perplexity Florence received a letter from her old friend Colonel Graydon. It was an unexpectedly charming letter, full of gracefully implied compliment, and asking whether he should meet her in Venice that winter at the villa of some mutual friends. It was one of those easy, cheery, subtly flattering letters that men will write to pretty women at any time or place, but the suggestion about Italy was so insistently put that she bridled a little. She felt suddenly important to somebody at least. Charlie Graydon and she had dangled about in a semi-flirting acquaintanceship for a long time. He was known by her woman acquaintances as her "friend."

But she had rather given up expecting more. Now her plans were decided for her. She would go. All these hateful, annoying things that she had had to put up with, she said, she would leave behind her. Jonah-like she imagined trouble to be local. Hers was naturalised in London, between St. Chad's Church and the Hoyden Club.

Mr. Cartyn had treated her and her advances abominably. He had gone straight over to the enemy, and fallen in love with it! Very well, she would turn again to a man who did admire

her and appreciate, and leave all these horrid creatures and their affairs behind. The old story—my vanity is hurt: I will grind my heel on the world.

So two women far apart made plans to escape—one to injure him, and one to bless him.

CHAPTER XVII

"SOME one came here for you while you were away, Miss Hyde," said the new secretary at the Hoyden Club, the very lady with gold-rimmed glasses who had been Mary's fellow-candidate. It was three weeks after Cartyn's visit and the Hoyden in question had just returned.

"Who?" said that ever-curt and boyish one.

"He left his card—a clergyman. Here it is—the Rev. James Cartyn."

"For me? I don't know him," said Muriel, taking the card. "Who on earth is he?"

"He came to ask about Mrs. Fresne, who used to be here in my present post, I understand. She has gone away, and he wants her address."

"But I—why did he ask for me?" Miss Hyde was looking at the secretary hard, but her brown "outdoor" face was a deeper colour as she spoke.

"Oh, he didn't say. He said you had been a good friend to Mrs. Fresne, and that he had reason to believe she might write to you. If she did, would you favour him with her address?"

"Oh, that's all very well. Guess she won't write to me. Why should she? What's happened to her?"

"I can't make out, Miss Hyde. But the clergyman seemed distressed on her account—very agitated. I gathered he feared she might be in want, though he didn't say so, of course."

"In want!" Miss Hyde gave a long, low, steady whistle, beautifully executed, and very clear and sustained. Then, with an almost droll air of masculine abandon, recklessly overdone, she swaggered away to the smoking-room, her hands in her tweed skirt pockets, humming a tune.

Later in the day she came across the sepulchral Miss Jacques, who was hard at work copying out some heraldic mottoes from a reference book in the library, with her short-sighted eyes al-

most pressed on to the book. She peered up at Muriel and snorted in an unwelcoming fashion.

But Muriel repeated the new secretary's message in her off hand manner.

"Poor beast!" she said, sitting on the arm of a chair. "I say, Harriet, in want! D'you believe it?"

"Quite," said Miss Jacques, primly and going on with her copying work and nose-rubbing in dusty books. "Entirely. I should say it was exceedingly likely."

"Great Scott!" said Miss Hyde.

"Any protégé of Lady Jiberene's would be sure to come to that end," went on Miss Jacques, in deep, unmoved tones. "First she talks about her duties to her less-favoured sisters; then she stuffs their heads with nonsense, ideas beyond their social station; then, in a pique, she deserts them for some trifle—and there they are!"

"But this girl wasn't a bad sort. She didn't get her head so stuffed, did she? Of course she was one of your gentle, fluffy women, made for the home and the hearth, and all that, and had a soapy way of talking. But she struck me as reasonable when one scolded her. And, by Jove, she bore her disgrace like a brick! She wouldn't say a word in her own defence. I did think that was—well, clinking!"

"Yes, I recollect. No woman of decent self-respect would have answered Lady Jiberene's impertinences, put as they were. Certainly not. Rather be guillotined. Of course one would. Well?"

"Well," said Miss Hyde, swinging a large brown boot meditatively. "I'm going to make it my business to find that young woman, as this good parson says she's lost."

"You'll only get into trouble with Lady Jiberene if you interfere!"

"Ho! Lady Jiberene? But she's deserted her! Didn't you know? She told Mrs. D'Arblay she found 'many sad disappointments in her female benevolent work' the other day, and quoted this one as an instance." Miss Hyde mimicked poor Lady Jiberene's plaintively sweet accents with cruel accuracy.

But Miss Jacques simply said, "A-h-h-h!" in a long, solemn, ponderous fashion, gazing back at her friend with tragic interest.

She finished it up with "Um," and returned to her heraldic nose-scraping, only adding in a portentous manner—

"Then, I am with you."

"To be fair to old Jiberene," went on Miss Hyde, "I hear she did write to Mrs. Courtman, asking her all about her poor young friend; but Mrs. Courtman never replied at all. That settled the young friend."

"Horribly unjust, and bad form," said Miss Jacques, "not to reply to a letter, and on such a matter as any one's character. Oh well, manners died with George the Fourth."

"Yes, and morals came into fashion," said Muriel cheerfully.

She got up and sauntered away, having an appointment at her golf club, and Miss Jacques was left to her heraldry and her note-taking, now greatly interrupted by meditations on the horrible condition of modern manners.

But during the next few weeks Miss Hyde went about the Strand and the city a good deal, calling at the offices of several newspapers, for one of which she wrote sparse sporting notes in a heavy man's hand, and at all of these casually inquired whether they had among their contributors or reporters a certain Mrs. Fresne. She was unsuccessful in her attempts, though certainly not for want of courage and poking about. Amongst others she, too, tried the office of *The World's Trumpet* in vain, and cut short one of Mr. Calvin Hopper's most brilliant speeches on his humanitarian mission to Europe made especially for her benefit on the spur of the moment, by saying, "Thanks, awfully" in a loud baritone and turning on her heel in the middle of a fine rolling sentence. Mr. Hopper was left simply panting.

December, wet and cold and foggy, came and went, and still this laconic Hoyden went burrowing about in odd offices for female employment, and bureaus for ladies' work, with a steady, stolid persistency that defied time or distance. Miss Jacques, too, without any warning, and under cover of some mystic remarks about *noblesse* put an advertisement in the agony column of a paper, ever her own favourite feature in any journal, with supreme confidence that the lost lady would read the message and turn up. The lost lady might more easily have done that than understand it, for it was couched in initials and terms of a mystery so profound and entire that the reader would be clever indeed who should understand it.

Evidently Mary did not, for no voice came to Miss Jacques in answer to this enigmatical call into space.

For she had succeeded painfully well in her escape so far. She had found another and smaller Loder Street beyond Waterloo Bridge, undignified even by a corner emporium for rabbits, and had taken up her abode there, sadly enough, but strong in the consciousness that she was doing a just thing, if a cruel one. Women's ideas of self-sacrifice are often terribly sweeping in practical working. Certainly Mary's offering of herself upon the altar of her lover's good fame necessitated his being burned as a victim along with her, which fact would cast a puzzling doubt upon its entire usefulness. Sometimes that doubt bothered her too, in the silent watches of those nights when people turned out of neighbouring public-houses did not scream and sing too loudly to permit of consecutive thought. Sometimes they did and she was glad in the small hours of the morning when even they went to sleep, to take her own rest and give up thinking and thinking till her head ached.

She went on struggling with her writing and reporting, making a living after a fashion—the kind of living that only women, beings who can live on weak tea and chalky eggs and stale buns, would quite dignify by the name, but glad of one small blessing in her self exile, namely, that rent was less in this southern Loder Street than in the more stately West End.

Sometimes on finer Sundays, when she was not too tired, she went to the Abbey or St. Paul's. Churchtime and the ringing of familiar bells always got more horribly on her nerves than all the struggles of her week; she felt so wild then to throw caution to the winds and to go once more to St. Chad's and see him hear him, be with him, even from a lonely distance. She said then, that she could so easily hide in the crowd by going at night and sitting right at the back, more especially if she wore a thick veil and kept behind some pillar. She had to argue all over again to herself every Sunday, particularly on clear nights when the sound of bells came clashing and clanging over the holiday city, the bells of the Strand churches carried and mel-
lowed by the river in between, and sometimes the far call of the Abbey. She used to think herself noble indeed, when, having sometimes on those winter Sunday evenings reached the Abbey with its black bulk looming up before her, glorified by the effect

of stained windows lighted from within, its huge doorways busy with entering people, she yet could resist the counter attraction of empty 'buses rattling along Victoria Street in that most dear direction. It would be so easy to jump into one of these and find oneself in a short time put down into the very midst of those beloved scenes. Sometimes Sunday 'bus conductors must have thought her a horrible nuisance, as, prayer-book in hand, she half-turned from the Abbey gates to glance over her shoulder in answer to their reiterated, business blandishments. Sometimes her eyes, then, looked unutterably yearning, a yearning quite unwarranted by the appearance of the stuffy blue vehicle she gazed upon so fondly, so sordid and vulgar a rival to the vast Abbey, yet, to her, a fairy prince's chariot capable of carrying one to entire earthly happiness.

She took a church newspaper of a kind likely to give her trifling information about London churches and clergy, always in the hope that his name might appear there. One day it did, in connection with some Midland convocation or gathering of churchmen shortly to be held, a mere unit in a long list, but to her the only really important name in the whole string, though it led off with three famous bishops. It even appeared to be written in larger letters. She noted the date and that he must be away for at least three days to attend the series of meetings and discussions, as he was to be one of the speakers. When the time arrived, she went out one weekday evening and really did yield to the invitations of the 'bus conductors going in that magnetic direction, and entered one of their vehicles. He was away, she said to herself, safe in the heart of the Midlands and busy with his public work. She would be quite safe in creeping back once again to those familiar places and satisfying the longings of her lonely heart by looking again at the outside of his beautiful church, his house, his belongings, and with almost equal reverence on the squalid joys of Loder Street. It was a dark November evening, drizzly and hot, by no means inspiring, and after she left the 'bus and struck through side streets into the familiar neighbourhood, Mary felt an uncomfortable sensation of guilt, though she had a perfect right to her depressing little night pilgrimage. She slipped along rather quickly and shyly, really afraid if people looked at her, not so much because she thought there would be any in those evening crowds of ab-

sorbed persons who recognised her, but because, like most persons on a sentimental journey, she imagined that every one she met knew her errand. Ah, how still and dark and tall his church looked, looming out of the semi-mist, semi-drizzle. There was a faint light showing from the stained windows—dare she go in? Oh, only for a moment. She did so, pulling down her veil, and slipping into a back pew behind a pillar. Tolley and his satellites were busy somewhere about the huge place; she could not see them in the gloom, but distant clankings of feet and shuttings of doors told her of their presence. It was only three weeks since she had left, but already it seemed like years, and she wanted wildly to go and hunt out old Tolley, and feel the stimulus of the acrid-friendly greeting that she knew would be accorded her if she did anything so rash and silly. Tolley had always rather taken her under his Geneva wing, though she had never been known to yield a single tip, a record in Tollinian annals.

After half an hour she rose and slipped out, just as Tolley's crab-like form appeared from the far vestry door carrying the immemorial wax-taper with intent to light up for an evening service, and went away into the dark night, making direct for Loder Street. And now she had come to the real purpose of her pilgrimage. Pulling down her veil still closer, though this was quite unnecessary, she entered the corner-shop, the bird-fancier's, with quick steps, and asked to look at tame rabbits, in rather a breathless voice. The wet evening had caused these creatures to be brought into the sawdusty warmth of the shop, and the man led her to a row of cages, along which she ran an eager eye. But, yes!—there he was, the ginger rabbit, still eating his stale lettuces and glancing out at her with a sublime mixture of toleration and scorn. She asked his price, and though it was a heavy one for her, including the cost of a cage, she had scraped it up and she paid it. She asked a few questions about his feeding and wants, and came away carrying his heavy cage half-shrouded with sacking, and took a homeward 'bus, happily empty, upon which was a conductor with marked tastes in zoology, who made no difficulty about the little beast's transit. On the contrary, the conductor got painfully friendly and not only fed the creature with biscuits from his own pocket, but wanted to know where Mary lived.

From these advances she eventually escaped with her animal,

laughing at herself for her folly, yet glad she had even this furry companion, and so gained her little home, where the landlady had received due information about the new lodger, and where he met with quite a welcome.

Whether she stayed at home to write, or came in after a whole day about her paper offices and small reportings, the tawny, fluffy, grave-faced thing welcomed her with its moist brown velvet eyes turned up to hers, and its long, soft ears cocked at her approach or slightest word. To her it stood for the living type of those brief but glorious days when she and Cartyn had met in her little home, those days of jonquils in Benares bowls, of Kew walks and entire happiness.

So, in her dark obscure lodging, or between that and the crowded Strand, the Strand that is so awful and rushing a place to one helpless unit that it has no use for, she plodded along in her self-inflicted exile with quiet unconscious heroism, stuck to her daily battle and her daily meed of loneliness with a perseverance and "grit" of which no one, who saw her delicate face shimmer out of the bulging crowds like a faint pearly fresco appearing suddenly on a wall of station advertisements, would have deemed her capable.

And all the time the hard-faced Hoyden was scouring those regions in search of her, and yet they did not meet. For Muriel Hyde, go-ahead, unflinching soul as she was, only searched her own Strand, not Mary's, which will fully explain the dilemma, for there are in a sense almost as many Strands as there are planets. Certainly, the one the Hoyden knew was in its way connected with literature, but only with that literature which deals cheerfully on heavily glazed "lead" paper, with puppy dogs, their antecedents, their owners, and their owners' houses, and sometimes, quite incidentally, their owners' husbands and children: also with sports and photographs of games necessitating the ladies wearing terrible costumes, especially boots—splay-shaped and studded with huge nails, and swinging hockey sticks, or "putting" with flying hair and flapping belts. For these, and their kindred, Miss Hyde wrote, as has been said, and with this view of literature alone was she concerned: she could really hardly conceive of any other. So she badgered the inmates of the smart up-to-date offices of these papers with her quest of "trekking" Mary, but never so much as thought of applying to

the smaller femininities in the journalistic world, where, high up in little rooms at the very tops of buildings devoted to bigger periodicals, were brought forth weekly the modest snippings of these, dressed up prettily, in a gossipy manner, and sold to good home ladies who never so much as dreamed of keeping show kennels and getting photographed for it. Had she done so, she would certainly have managed to tumble across Mary one of those days, for that was quite her present world, but what, to her, were the mysteries of home dressmaking fully explained with diagrams? Why should people she would have said, want to hear how to give a tea-party, or how to make table centres, or what the great world of Society was doing, or could do if it tried: want to read paragraphs explaining how a certain pretty young duchess might have been a violinist, or could have been an artist, or could have rivalled Milton if she hadn't had so many parties to go to.

The manly lady wrote to Mr. Cartyn, after hearing that he had called to see her, explaining with characteristic curtness that she did not know of the whereabouts of Mrs. Fresne, but would make every possible inquiry, and should she hear would let him know, unless he had already come across her.

He wrote and thanked her in a letter whose fervent tone, though unconscious, rather revealed his secret to Muriel, who had never thought of that explanation before.

"Well, I declare!" she said to herself, "if it isn't some sort of a love affair! I can just see that young woman married to a parson, and presiding at coal-clubs and blanket-teas—no, soup-teas, or whatever they are. Well, this makes it more sporting, certainly. Hallo! I've got an idea!" She stopped, right at the corner of Charing Cross, her hands stuck into her skirt side-pockets openly ruminating. "I'll go and see old Jiberene. I don't suppose she knows her whereabouts, but she could tell me what papers she writes for."

She leapt into a passing motor-omnibus without a second's further thought, and dashed to Hyde Park without the least compunction, though Lady Jiberene was certainly at the moment one of her most implacable foes. She got off at Hyde Park Corner and went swinging along Park Lane towards the northern side, utterly inconsequent and indifferent as to what Lady Ji-

berene would think, say, or do, and whether she would even as much as admit her.

Arrived at Sussex Place, she was shown in by the footman, who was fairly used to oddities in the course of his lady's wide charitable schemes, and who shunted her indifferently into a small room at the back of the house along a passage continuing from the hall, a room not unlike the waiting chamber at the dentist's. He assumed, without question, that she was either socialistic or C.O.S. if she wasn't even lower in the visitor's degree.

Lady Jiberene was heard bidding "good-bye" warmly and effusively to some friends coming down the stairs, and then almost immediately bustled into the little passage sanctum and instantly froze. Froze red, rigid, grim, stiff, and stared through Muriel at a window overlooking a backyard with blackened laurels in pots, and awaited her explanation.

Muriel, never slow, sketched her request so jauntily that Lady Jiberene gasped at her coolness.

"I have no recollection," she said, addressing the yard laurels, "of any newspapers for which that lady reported, beyond *The World's Trumpet*."

She was nearly crying. It was awful to be torn between a righteous desire to snub this impertinent, irrepressible new woman, standing like a great boy before her, and yet to live up to her reputation of my lady of charity. She would have liked immensely to give out a passionate, pettish outcry against Mary and her ingratitude, but she simply daren't if she wished to retain her reputation for motherly sweetness, for she knew that Muriel Hyde was lynx-eyed for inconsistencies and shams, and perfectly pitiless in her manner of exposing these to a heartless world.

"Thanks," said Muriel loftily; "then I won't trouble you. Only, as you probably know, she's lost—gone away. We can't find her. I'm on a hunt. That's why I came."

Lady Jiberene's face flushed even more—was there no end to Mary's partisans? Through her, and the fatal letter she had written about her to Mrs. Courtman, she reckoned that she had lost that lady's illuminating friendship. At any rate, she had received no reply. It was another score against Mary. Mr. Cartyn had gone too. No longer, she found, would he attend

the Guild of Harmony soirees, though held in full splendour on the site of the calico ocean, now restored to its ancient glory, and this year beguiled by a Hungarian band with tassels on its boots. She put it all down to Mary.

"I cannot, henceforth," she said, "be considered an authority on that young person's movements. She has other supporters. I would refer you to Mr. Cartyn, the vicar of St. Chad's, South Kensington."

"Oh, I have heard from him."

"May I ask when?"

"Oh, he called a few weeks ago."

"I saw him myself yesterday," said Lady Jiberene. "And I, like you, expressed a hope that she—that lady—was doing well as he came to me about her last summer. He replied very shortly that her future was now his own affair. By which I gathered he meant to marry her."

"He can't if he's lost her!" said Muriel.

Lady Jiberene bowed coldly.

"He must mean something," said Muriel. "Perhaps she's come into some money?"

"I understood that she originally lost her fortune through her own fault," said Lady Jiberene, unable to resist the little dig.

"Then that's it!" cried Muriel. "You bet he's found some way of getting it back for her. Fished up the whole truth and put it right. That's it! Good-bye—sorry to have troubled you. The man's a trump! He's found a way out of it!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A FLOCK of veiled girls, all in fluffy white—fair-haired, black-haired, brown-haired—in the mellow sepia shadows of the big church doors. A faint frou-frou of feet, light like flower petals, a rustle of fresh garments, a passing dream of blossom-faces soft, excited, devout. Boys with big red ears caught into transparencies by the early spring sun, recently timid, but now grown impertinent and splashing in at the gaudy stained windows, colouring all things purple and gold and red, and lighting up those poor self-conscious ears unkindly.

The verger with a black and silver staff and a bristle of hair and several fussing and official persons in various black garments, fidgeting in the porch shadows awaiting the bishop. A scent of lavender water, and russia leather, and new oak was over the whole.

Mr. Cartyn, whose thin, brown face looked the thinner for his stiff, narrow cassock, came down an aisle and spoke to Brother Anselm, who, attired in something between an overcoat and a dressing-gown, flew round in great excitement. It was a black garment with "jockey" sleeves, and had a sash. The wearer required shaving.

"How many candidates have you?" said Cartyn. "Did you give me your cards?"

"I brought five," said Brother Anselm. "Four girls and a man. The man is a converted barrister."

Cartyn glanced over at the men's side instinctively. He had heard before of the converted barrister, and now a head, highly fledged with fawn fluff, with one ferocious and one shut eye reared above a pew-top was indicated as that gentleman's. It looked a little like a moth-eaten Jack-in-the-box.

Cartyn took the cards gravely.

"Do you often get men coming forward for confirmation?" he said.

"Oh, not infrequently. No. The Church makes many vic-

tories even in this hardened, worldly age. This man drifted into our Churchman's Club in the first instance, quoting Huxley and Holyoake and Bradlaugh. He now genuflects of his own accord, and wears a metal badge on his watch-chain."

"I suppose you count him a great triumph?"

"Well, I should, but he borrows money."

Just then the vicar turned aside at a small commotion going on in the aisle, by reason of two militant ladies desiring to push themselves into the seats roped off for candidates. Tolley was arguing with them in a stage-whisper, and shaking his black stick threateningly.

"Miss Limpole and Miss Yearsley!" said Brother Anselm. "They cannot find a seat."

"There are plenty here at the back quite unoccupied."

"Oh yes, but they always desire to sit near the front. They are amongst the most faithful—they have never yet missed a service at which I was present. I say it, I hope, without vanity."

Cartyn thought the hope a safe one. The two ladies were obviously calculated to inspire that passion. Fiercely excited, and expostulating in heaving whispers, they clung rigidly to the red cord that barred them from the front seats. Miss Ursula Limpole wore a semi-uniform costume of rusty black, a cross between that of a nun and a nurse, combining the severity of both these dresses without the neatness of either, with the result that she looked like an eccentric widow, except that no one perhaps, would have suspected any man of marrying her. She had eager, light eyes set obliquely like a Chinese, and a pinched mouth, and was tall and thin and brick-red in colour. Miss Zoe Yearsley was much shorter and very sallow, and wore drab, unrelieved, unmitigated. Her chin was held so very much poked forward that it seemed as if the jawbone had started out of its place with the effort, and showed most unpleasantly through the skin, like a lesson on anatomy. She had heavy eyelids and wispy hair done in a tight walnut at the back of a round hard head like a cricket ball. Her drab felt hat, severe and "artistic" combined, continually jibbed over to one side or another. As she moved in strange jerks after long pauses, as lizards do, the hat became a perfect see-saw.

But these ladies were determined to out-argue Tolley, and Cartyn was beginning to feel constrained to make some sugges-

tion, when Tolley's quicker wit came to the rescue. Holding tightly on to his red rope, he pointed to Brother Anselm—

"There's your own clergyman. Go and ask him about church law!" he said.

Immediately they flew towards Anselm greeting him, chins first, with great eagerness.

By this time, although a weekday, the church was nearly full, even at the back, with friends and parents of the candidates, and the vicar slipped past their group into the vestry to receive the bishop. Brother Anselm was obliged to follow, and after a second or two's delay, persuaded his two followers to be content to seat themselves in one of the only available pews at the west end. Tolley, snorting with secret delight, hurried also into the vestry, waving his broken-ended taper like a flag of victory. But the triumph was shortlived. When the clergy and choir, in procession with the bishop, had seated themselves for the opening address there, under the shadow of the lectern, in full view of the whole church, side by side on hassocks and craning earnestly forward, sat Miss Limpole and Miss Yearsley!

They had run round the back into the aisle directly Tolley had turned, and had darted under the red cord with this royal result. They looked, with their chins poked forward in contemplation, like a couple of barges in the Medway, with both pointed sails leaning to against the sky. And though they were a spectacle at once for choir and congregation, they remained unmoved. Gog and Magog could not have looked more perfectly confident of their right of place in the Guildhall. And there they remained in glory. Speechless Tolley gazed at the ceiling for the rest of the office, as though searching disgustedly for flies.

When it was all over Brother Anselm elected to walk back with Cartyn. He said, "You are not looking well."

"Don't your friends expect you, though?" said the vicar, madly anxious for escape.

"Those ladies? No, indeed. It is not my rule to be seen in the street with the fair sex."

"The what?" said Cartyn. He could not resist it.

"We avoid women."

"It must be difficult, sometimes," replied the vicar, remembering the ruse of this morning. He was wretchedly ill and worried, and wanted to avoid his erratic companion. Just now the pres-

ence of this mild crank, with his unworkable notions, and clap-trap ecclesiasticisms, had a really irritating effect. He must have showed it.

"Are you not well, brother?"

"Oh no—yes. I can't say, quite. I'm hipped. I'm going for a long walk. Shall we part here?"

"I will depart when you wish. But I only came with you, brother, because I feel that you are in some trouble of mind and I hoped to be of some use. I would wish to be."

Cartyn listened irritably and looked almost with anger at the flabby-white face, the fantastic get-up of the creature at his side. But something in the dreamer's grey-blue eyes, something human, shot out and stayed his temper. Was it pity? He had never seen Anselm look human before and he was touched.

"I have had a good deal of worry lately," he replied more gently. "For one thing I'm beginning to find out—oh well, that a lot of our methods as ministers, shepherds, what you will, are all wrong. You may not agree with me, but I am convinced of it."

The brief gleam of human kindness flickered out of the other man's eyes. Concerned, fierce, outraged they gazed at the speaker.

"But, my brother, the Church cannot err! You do not venture to question her doctrines? You——"

"My dear man, I'm thinking more of conduct than doctrines. The time has come for the clergy to show doctrines in practice, rather than in discussion! Do you know I sometimes think that while we churchmen are discussing doctrines the real work that Christ left to do is being done by the men outside, in silence? By the doctors in the hospitals, and the struggling chaps who do all sorts of unnamed social services, and make decent laws. By fair-minded women, and all the simple unaffected creatures who just know how to get along by the law of love. I don't attack the Church, God knows! I attack the teachers, who obscure her by formalism, by platitudes, by inanities, by prayers, mumbled into incoherence, or turned into flippancy by sing-song monotones. Criminally indifferent, calling anything stupid and didactic orthodox! More ignorant of the real world of men and women and their real hopes and thoughts, than a dead beetle in a collection would be!"

"My good friend, you are beside yourself."

"Perhaps I am. But I attack what I know. The description is of myself—a few months ago. There are hundreds like it. Fancy expecting an intoning machine, with a few automatic phrases—one cannot call them ideas!—turned out from the 'varsity at twenty-three to meet the great tide of sins and follies of the London of to-day! And fancy expecting the same machine to comprehend the immense heroism and beauty of that same world! Do you know," he turned his thin brown face with its curiously half-shut eyes and looked at Anselm straightly, "we are some of us driven to learn our A B C as pastors from the least and meanest of our flock."

Anselm shook an agitated head. He recollected Miss Limpole on church law, a subject upon which she was constantly asking his advice, with eager chin and eye. He had always been the teacher himself. Miss Limpole would listen for hours.

"I cannot agree," he cried. "I learn nothing from mine, I devoutly hope. Good as many women are they cannot teach."

Cartyn, preoccupied in his own thought, went on, "One can learn it from a sinner."

"Good gracious!"

"From a woman."

"My dear, good friend."

"From a woman-sinner."

Brother Anselm nearly crossed himself.

"Learn what?" he said, with rolling eye.

"The only thing that makes the ministry of any use—love," said Cartyn.

"Love? Love? Good friend, what terrible, what frightful ideas! Love learnt from—did you say women? Really, this is very appalling. Now, I myself encourage our good sisters in the work: are they not to have their due part in the work, in their place? Are they not of use to clean brasses and address envelopes, and so on? But to be taught love by them? Impossible!"

Cartyn, remembering Miss Limpole's bonnet, agreed readily. He shook his head half whimsically.

"Well, well, I suppose I mean one learns by one's failures," he said.

"But, my brother, only the Church can teach. She is all-sufficient."

"Yes, it was to the Jews while love was being born in a stable," said Cartyn quietly, adding, "love is still born in stables, in failures, in despair." His tone was heavy and sorrowful.

Brother Anselm glanced at him wonderingly and shook his head. A gently worried head, a gently worried heart, containing far more of the human love it belittled than it could ever be aware of this side of its judgment. He was really sorry for Cartyn. Herein he contradicted himself most charmingly.

Just at that moment two figures loomed across their path—a bat-like black figure and a drab figure. Brother Anselm started in terror.

"Well, brother, I will say good-bye, and I shall have you in my thoughts," he added kindly, and nodding, as he fled across the road and on to a 'bus just about to start in his own homeward direction. After him, across the road, darted two determined figures. At bay, he turned round, raised his "flop" hat and bowed coldly. It was the cut direct, and they knew his rules about the "fair sex." The 'bus started off with a flourish, but before it had gone three paces, it was hailed madly, captured and boarded; and the last vision Cartyn had was of the brother looking worried on the front seat by the driver, and just behind him in adoring contemplation of his back, the black pseudo uniform bonnet of Miss Limpole, and the drab felt hat of Miss Yearsley, by this time at an angle altogether indescribable. So this was "keeping them in their place!" Shaking himself free of the whole thing with a half laugh, Cartyn pushed off towards the Green Park. He simply wanted a walk, and he chose a park that did not remind him of the past. The afternoon had faded into grey now, and the buildings, tall and uneven, ghostly over the vague distance, looked like the image of a dream citadel, seen across a vast Siberia of vague terrors and desolation. He hardly saw all these things, because his mind was absorbed, as had now become entirely his habit, in the everlasting question called up by the utter upheaving of his life since that never-forgotten day in Lent, and as he walked, his eyes were kept almost on the ground, as though he sought there the answer to his unhappy riddle. To many types of mind there was, could be, no riddle at all involved in such a train of circumstances; the

thing would be simple enough from one point of view or another—either the highest or the lowest. But in his defence it must be remembered that he had practically never had a moral difficulty of his own to deal with in all his busy, eager, triumphant career until this one had come and struck him, and brought him low. The long habit of believing that moral strength can be bought by the tin badges of devout societies, and the accurate formulæ of some particular party in the Church had not reared him in spiritual muscularity, and now that a simple matter of right and wrong had faced him, all these props had fallen away, and he stood, as he was, before himself. And he himself was the bitterest of judges. It was hard indeed, after all those years of success, to see now of what he was really made, to discover the exact material of which his fine, daring, militant Christian character was really composed; wool, where he believed it iron; passion, where he had dreamed of a will of cold steel.

"Poor Anselm," he said to himself; "so good, so genuine, so self-denying. Dressed up like a scarecrow, but giving every farthing he has away to the poor creatures who hang about him for what they can get! With his mean vicarage turned into a sort of untidy monastery, minus rules; and his mean income shared with every cadger who will play up to his notions of ritual. There's a man with a grand heart, but rendered practically incapable of doing anything in the world because he prefers to understand church rites rather than humanity! That is what I might have become, was becoming, if I had not stumbled across a woman's sin, and equalled it by my own! Only I was never as great as Anselm. He has, at least, always lived for others however stupidly and blindly. I lived only for my petty clerical reputation! There's no fear of my doing that again!"

He glanced over at the towers of Westminster fading ghost-like on an oyster-coloured haze of sky.

"To be one with London!" he said. "One with the faults and miseries of it, after all! Not a little plaister demi-god in a parish niche, but a shepherd who at least lives with his sheep, and feels with them, fights the same things with them! It is almost worth losing what I have lost. And good God, what I have lost."

All through that winter he worked as he had never done before. The New Year dawned, and the slow, cold early months

trailed themselves along in wet and fog and wind, and still he struggled with an almost desperate zeal. Furiously he used to say to himself that because he had failed in the big things of life, he would start and do little ones well, and undoubtedly he did them so well that he never gave himself any rest or peace, any time to think or brood till utter physical exhaustion made him seek his bed at night and sleep through his haunting trouble. He proved himself, at that time, to be the friend of the poor in a way he had never done in the old days. Mr. Calvin Hopper might have learnt more than fine platform phrases of a sounding character on the subject of the brotherhood of man, if he had happened to slip down into some of the wretched streets where the vicar daily visited; but like most professional brothers of men that humanitarian was ill acquainted with such neighbourhoods. A mission to Europe would naturally preclude you from visiting the next-door neighbour in grief and sickness; those great world-stirring things rarely allow time for little common courtesies or sympathies. Such things belong to the unimaginative followers of the Teacher who went about from village to village "doing good," not to professional reformers.

Sometimes it was talked about. One wet, windy night after one of the Lenten services, as the people streamed out, two men discussed it.

"I never heard the vicar preach like that before," said one of the churchwardens to Mr. Holden.

"Didn't you? Well, no. Not so serious, perhaps. But he's always a good preacher, eh?"

"Oh, good. It was something more than that. It was extraordinary, a sort of appeal, wasn't it? It seemed to me to be almost personal in a fashion. You'd think he had something on his mind—he just gave that sort of impression. It was beyond me. That talk about a man giving up himself, his best hopes, ideals even, for the sake of another, seems a bit theatrical—the way he put it. I have never known him so vehement."

"No, well, perhaps not," said Holden. "You haven't time to go to so many services as I do, but I can tell you he's beginning to talk like that pretty often now. There's some change come over him. Every one says so. He's quite silent outside church. can't get a word with him, or a cigar, or anything; but in it—great Jupiter! He seems as if his tongue had been unloosed,

cut somehow, and as if he was simply blazing to tell us all something that he has gone through himself. He's made a tremendous stir. Can't think what it is. He seems altered, aged, somehow. He was a boy, comparatively, a year ago—now he's growing into something like a genius."

"He doesn't seem to enjoy it, then," said the other churchwarden. "Genius takes it out of you, I suppose. He's looking horribly ill and worn out, like a man on the verge of a bad illness. Couldn't you get him to see a doctor?"

Mr. Holden scratched his grey head unhappily.

"My wife tried," he replied a little ruefully. "She takes a sort of motherly interest in him, you know."

"Well, I believe she does," said the other, making a wry grimace in the dark, and adding "mother-in-lawly" to himself.

"But he wouldn't even discuss it," went on the puzzled Holden, lurching his heavy figure as he walked and shaking his big head in perplexity. "She says he was so ill-tempered that she was sure that was a woman in it."

"The ladies know their own influence so well!"

"She says there's always a woman behind it, when a man gets preoccupied and rather rude."

"Probably."

"But it's never the right woman."

"There isn't such a thing—on the feminine horizon," said the other.

"Well, no, that's true." Mr. Holden glanced furtively round as though to be sure no one could by any chance hear him. Then he whispered with volcanic earnestness—

"Considering they're ministering angels, the ladies *do* a lot of scratching, don't they?"

But if the churchwardens found the vicar's change puzzling the verger was equally perturbed, but more definite in coming to the point. He caught him now, as he was about to leave the church. He stood guard over the vestry door, looking more like a Muscovy duck than ever with his red flaming face and fringe of grey whiskers, and little beady eyes.

"Sir," he said, with far more respect in his tone than he was accustomed to use, as he fumbled feverishly with his waxen taper, turning it round and round in some distress of mind. "Aren't

you goin' to obey the doctor's orders and go away for a bit soon?"

Cartyn turned in amazement. "Why, Tolley? What makes you ask?"

"I ask," said Tolley, still fingering the wax, "because if you don't go away for a bit, you'll go away altogether." The tone was impetuously angry.

The vicar glanced more keenly at the old man's face and saw that it was twisted into funny knots and turns, and that there was a humidness about his hard old eyes not usually seen there.

"Altogether?" he said.

"Yes. Altogether—up yonder," he said, pointing up at the vestry ceiling with a jerk of the taper, and obviously trying to control his voice. "You look ill. You're worn out. You're all goin' to nothing. You're"—he paused and looked solemnly at Cartyn—"you're getting old!"

The vicar laughed shortly and sadly. "I thought that was what you wanted, Tolley. You've always accused me and the bishop of being 'boys.' If I get old in your eyes I shall be old indeed."

"Age," said Tolley, "is for them as had had experience. I'm old because I've seen a lot of life, and a good bit of the uselessness of some of it. But you—you haven't *lived* yet. You mustn't get old, sir. It's too soon, when you haven't lived. As for me. I've been married twice, and this one's got a tongue. It's time for me to get old."

"I see. Then you'll let me grow old when I've been married twice?"

"You'll do it of your own accord then," said Tolley gravely. "I shan't be able to stop you."

"But you think you can stop me now?"

"I'll try, vicar," said Tolley, elaborately putting away a surplice that he pretended was off its right hook to hide a twitching of his old face. "If you've got a trouble, sir, and you're not well, you go away from here and forget all about us for a bit and take care of yourself, and you'll come back yourself again."

"A trouble? Who said anything about trouble?"

"No one said nothing. Me heart tells me, that's all," grated Tolley. He coughed a few moments and recovered his original voice. "I had a son once that fretted about something he'd done as was wrong—played about with a bit of money he did,

and couldn't return it, and he looked like you're looking. There was a young woman in that, too. He died. He was consumptive, though. Perhaps you aren't; but if doctor says 'go away,' I say go away. There's ways out of these things that only trees and fields and seas and suchlike can find out for you, that I know. A bit of dandelion on a grassy bank'll often make muddles plain in a sort of way; so will some o' them skies that isn't hid by chimneys—and churchspires," he added spitefully, falling back into his ancient manner after his little flight of sentiment.

The vicar thanked him for his kindly thought and lingered a short time talking to him before going out into the raw air. In the London streets things looked so black and dreary and wet that it was difficult to imagine Tolley's dandelion on a bank yet. yet possibly it was somewhere to be found in sheltered Hampshire lanes and warm spongy places even now. But it was a harsh and bitter spring this year, and he shuddered a little as he contemplated the idea of a lonely semi-holiday at such a time without the stimulus of his work to keep him from too saddening thought. All gardens would remind him of Mary at Kew, he said, and the first faint call of springing Nature would only come as an invocation of what he had lost—in her and his own once glorious hopes.

Then an extra blast of east wind suddenly taking that wet, wretched London by storm, and some extra attendance on his poor, threw him, one of those days, on a bed of sickness; influenza, the doctor called it, a vague enough, weakening thing that left him utterly shaky after ten days of it, and convinced at last that he must do something for his health before Lent, which was now close upon them.

He heard one day from a friend at a rather noted clergy hostelry, situated in a warm corner under the Sussex Downs, and conceived the idea of going down there for a short change, especially as a retreat was to be held there by one of his revered friends.

A retreat! He had not thought of that before. If he could go there and get some strength and consolation by placing his fault and his trouble before the thoughtful and kindly judgment of such a man as the missionary—a good and great man, a celebrated bishop, a man of strong and silent character, and unshaken consistency of action, he might get some relief at last from his

protracted mental suffering. He grasped almost eagerly at the chance, and sent in his name to the superior of the hostelry, with an enthusiasm that recalled his boyish impulsiveness of old.

In due time he went down to the retreat, a sad, dim ghost of his old self, in search of health and peace, amongst those quiet downlands and the blessed shadows of holier, remoter things.

What had he meant by Mary's assured future? Had he secured it by his treachery or by his prayers? As he knelt in the little white stone chapel, wrapped round in the utter stillness of calm nature, and the calm hush that good men make for their own souls and those of the bruised and beaten, no one looking at his thin face could say.

Passionately he prayed for the woman who had sinned and come to him in vain, and for the woman for whom he said he himself had become a traitor.

Did a little journalist making her tired way over Waterloo Bridge feel the winged thing bless her? And did a feverish woman away in a Roman hotel find her self-love shaken by fluttering influences to sudden tears? Who can tell how soul kisses soul across the silence, across the world?

CHAPTER XIX

"MRS. FRESNE, Mrs. Fresne—is that you? Please—a moment! Is that you?"

A tremendous black figure, like a monster ghoul swooped on to Mary from behind and clutched her by the arm. The arrest had taken place on a wretchedly wet December evening in the Strand, and the crowds of pushing people and the blocked traffic looked like figures out of some wet inferno, luridly lighted by the shop lights, and sloppy and sticky unspeakably.

A wet, piercing wind was blowing, and Mary was struggling along against it and the falling mist, from the direction of Arundel Street, where she had been visiting a newspaper office in a painfully fruitless search for work. A few trifling jobs had been the outcome of two whole days so spent, representing, even when laboriously done, only a few shillings, and she was hurrying home again, meaning to cross Waterloo Bridge to the grey and infinitely horrible deserts beyond it. She started with almost hysterical terror as the hand out of the crowd touched her arm, showing plainly by her extreme nervousness the ravages even a few months of poor living and hard struggles had made on her nerves. Her white face, gleaming under the electric light, looked pitiful and thinner, and her breath came and went quickly as she gazed up at her captor.

"Yes, it is you!" said a gruff voice.

"Miss Jacques!" gasped Mary, in utter amazement, staring unreservedly at the immense horse-profile dimly showing in the gloomy half-light, and the inevitable and ponderous toque with its conglomeration of shady and funereal finery. Forgotten visions of Hoydens floated before Mary's tired eyes.

"Yes, Miss Jacques. Are you in a hurry? If not, do come in here and talk a bit." She pushed towards an ABC tea-shop, which looked warm and steamy seen here in the wet street from the outside. Mary followed in entire astonishment. Miss Jacques, her most bitter foe, through the Lady Jiberene, to re-

quest a chat in a tea-shop! She racked her brains to recollect Hoyden days, but could remember no occasion when Miss Jacques had even condescended to speak to her, except to bully her, because the drawing-room was not hot enough, though the barometer used to register 80°.

"Oh dear," groaned poor Mary; "am I to hear a long string of Hoyden squabbles again? I really shan't defend anything or anybody if she begins—I'm too tired——"

But Miss Jacques, after ordering hot chocolate in a very lordly and distant fashion, proceeded to ask Mary with a certain stately deference, even courtesy, whether she was continuing her secretarial work anywhere. Her eyes, when she asked this question, roamed short-sighted and heavy-lidded over any object within their vision, save Mary's poor and inadequately warm clothes, her worn face, her gloves whose original colour was lost in the mist of tradition. She did not appear to see these things. Mary felt a rush of gratitude to her for refraining from the impertinent inspection that would certainly have been her fate at the hands of Lady Jiberene under such circumstances—the clear curiosity of the vulgarly kind, that takes away half their kindness.

A reserved outline of Mary's experiences was soon told, a mere sketch, indicated carelessly, as pride will always do. Miss Jacques was left to fill in the details for herself. But she did not appear to be so employed.

"And Lady Jiberene has not used her—her *boundless* Press influence to find you other—er—literary pursuits?" said the solemn lady, pulling off her gloves and re-arranging some very solid ancient rings, mainly of yellow topaz and black pearl and human hair, worn not in the least as jewellery—she was far from being so frivolous—but as formal reminders or mementoes of somebody or something in a sombre past. Practically they occupied the place of a portable tombstones, and did not look unlike them.

"I did not expect it," said Mary proudly. "I would not have accepted it if she had."

"Really! Oh well, I thought she was your friend?"

"She was—once. But she—well—she mistrusted me. I cannot endure mistrust."

"Certainly not!" snapped Miss Jacques in her belligerent, resonant voice. "Nobody could, I should think. A little patronising upstart! Unheard of till yesterday. Of no family—nobody.

A soap-boiler's wife, with a petty handle to her vulgar name, and a string of paltry, middle-class beliefs and prejudices and patronages and notions! Dear me!"

"Oh, it isn't that," said Mary. "It's just the mistrust itself that one minded, you know. The other things are her affair, not mine. In many ways Lady Jiberene was kind, very kind. It was her disbelief that one found impossible to bear."

"You put it most excellently. You show your breeding and your sense. Nevertheless, I hold," said Miss Jacques, jerking a teaspoon containing a crumb in a dramatic manner, "that the woman is utterly insufferable, unendurable, common, impudent, and underbred. Put her away. She is done with."

The crumb flew away and hit the pink evening newspaper of a clerk reading over his tea. Mary felt that Lady Jiberene was really finally disposed of by sign and symbol; though the clerk, who had got her, glanced contemptuously up at Miss Jacques with half-absorbed, half-resentful eyes, that clearly said, "Dotty old girl," to any spectator who might have been watching.

"It is odd that you should remember me," said Mary; "especially to recognise me on such a foggy evening in such a crowd!"

"Oh, I remembered you well enough," said Miss Jacques. "I have bothered about you for some time now. Your resignation was brought about most unfairly. Both Muriel Hyde and I felt that, and we made every effort to secure your being reinvited by the club to take your place there again. But it was not to be. They are too jealous. Muriel Hyde tried to get your address several times, but failed. We have both been very bothered about you. We do like proper treatment."

Mary remembered now the five pound note and the typewritten letter, and her eyes filled with tears. To think that these two poor Hoydens, whom she had hitherto regarded as enemies, should have put their heads together on her behalf, worried themselves because she had been unfairly treated by the club!

She showed some of her gratitude in her eyes as she thanked Miss Jacques.

"I wish I had known!" she said. "One needed a little cheering up at that time."

But her stern friend did not unbend at all, simply remarking airily, "Only vulgar persons let the gentle or the helpless suffer for their own convenience. I had to fight that woman Jiberene

myself, but I was horrified when I learnt that by my doing so you had been made a scapegoat. The law of chivalry demands that we should be scrupulously just to those in any way under our power. These are our traditions. They should be unbroken."

Mary gazed with awe at this solemn woman in the steamy tea-shop, sitting up erect in her odd garments, a mixture of grimness and finery, enunciating sentiments on the law of chivalry. She remembered the relation who was a peer, the Lord of Appeal, the Hoyden tradition that Miss Jacques was "well-born," and in spite of the long onyx earrings of a lodging-house keeper, and the dirty gardenias and out-of-curl tips of the towering toque, she now really began to believe in these things. How little had she known Miss Jacques!

Their conversation led to literary work, and her friend told her that she was at the present time very busy assisting in the compiling of an extensive history of heraldic emblems, in collaboration with her cousin, Lord Petercastle, an antiquarian of some note. She explained this very solemnly and cursorily, slurring over Lord Petercastle in a manner that would have shocked Lady Jiberene, who would have got the fullest possible flavour out of every syllable of that noble baron's title. For once the familiarity that breeds contempt struck Mary as dignified.

Miss Jacques said she wanted an intelligent typist and assistant.

"You type, don't you?"

"Yes, but I have no machine."

"Oh, I have. Suppose you fill up some of your spare hours by helping me in this? I could arrange a weekly honorarium, or as you like. If you care to see the work before you decide you might come home with me now, unless you're busy. I've got chambers in York Place, Baker Street. Do you care to?"

Mary tried to answer in a businesslike, not a grateful tone. Miss Jacques clearly meant her to, but she could not help seeing behind this elaborately simple offer the generous thought in the breast of this mostly lordly of Hoydens. Of course she consented to "look" at the work, her heart leaping up at the thought of a few extra shillings a week and regular work, and they got into a 'bus at Charing Cross and went home together to Miss Jacques' "chambers."

Mary would have called them lodgings pure and simple, but she remembered that Hoyden tradition demanded masculine terms for most things, and so followed her new friend up the thickly but shabbily carpeted staircase, made almost impassable by the perfectly overwhelming smell of dinner—apparently curried mutton of unrecorded antiquity—since Miss Jacques could never endure an open window, and into the little “floor” of rooms where the lady lived when not at her club.

It was a good thing that the night was cold, as the sitting-room, a large oddly shaped apartment made out of two rooms that turned a corner, was quite overwhelmingly hot and stuffy. It was also unspeakably untidy; littered by papers, books thrown open, books put back in shelves anyhow—sometimes with the cut edges showing out of the bookcases instead of the binding: slippers, cigarette boxes and ashtrays, inkstands, files, foot-warmers, footstools, and photographs. The furniture was heavy, stuffy, old-fashioned, shabby, and the wallpaper was ancient “flock,” of a depressing liver-colour and gold. But on the walls were some exquisite dark pictures—chiefly portraits—of people who were clearly personages of distinction, the relatives of this mysterious lady. There was one that took Mary’s fancy, a little oil painting, looking like a Lawrence, of a dark man of the Lord Melbourne type, his sombre court dress one blaze of stars and orders and insignia, these, and a coloured ribbon across his breast giving the only touch of life to its intense shadows.

Miss Jacques saw her look of admiration as she stopped before the picture. “That is my father, the Chevalier Jacques,” she said, now for the first time in Mary’s hearing pronouncing her name in the French fashion. “He was a gallant and brilliant man, who did this country a great service.”

“And was he then French?” said Mary with interest.

“He was, yes—but naturalised here. My mother was Lady Jane Roden, the daughter of the then Lord Petercastle. There she is—in pink silk. She was a beauty, as possibly you see for yourself. She met him at the court of Louis Phillipe.”

She gave Mary these little details in a matter-of-course manner, as she threw off her shabby enveloping mantle, and began hunting for some special MS. out of the hopeless-looking heap before her. To assist herself to be patient in the search she

lighted a cigarette and smoked it, and Mary, could almost have laughed outright as she beheld the queer figure with its severely dressed hair (for once the vast toque was off) pulled tightly from the brow with a velvet band round the head, and an obviously "stuffed" knot behind, the last relic of a chignon: the gaunt form, the sloppy clothes, and—quaintest contrast—the onyx earrings and the cigarette!

She went over and offered to help in the search, and after a really long rummage they found the document half hidden under a torn Almanac de Gotha, an odd slipper, a priceless crystal cupid given to Lady Jane Jacques by Queen Hortense, and a Britannia metal ashtray advertising somebody's mustard.

She soon found that Miss Jacques' MS., though itself original and accurate to a degree, was usually to be found in these or similar surroundings, and that its style consisted in jotting down as many conjunctions, and even small nouns, indicated by a simple initial letter, leaving the typist and printer to decipher this as well as possible; while the caligraphy, a forceful jagged edition of the old beloved Italian hand, was incomprehensible to a degree, being often duplicated, under-written, and even crossed, with the wildest disregard to sequence. The business of the assistant would be to disentangle all this, and make of it a fair, clear, readable copy in typewriting. But Mary only too gladly undertook to do it. Happily for herself she was very old-fashioned, and patience was one of her requirements, and she so badly needed the money that she willingly, even with trembling fear at her luck, ventured to pledge herself to the work. So it was arranged. A salary was spoken of. "Of course you observe I am wretchedly poor," said Miss Jacques with as little concern as when she had announced that her mother was a beauty at the court of Louis Phillipe. "I don't say it to beg the question, but to assure you that I am not mean—I hope. I live here because I am poor—and because I like my independence. My cousin will, however, reimburse me for any reasonable expenses, though of course he is also a pauper. He is, however, a decent pauper, an altruistic pauper, a chivalrous pauper. So if you will give me a few steady hours of every day for a pound a week we might settle it off-hand?"

To Mary it was wealth indeed. She settled it off-hand; and she spent the evening with her new employer being initiated

into her duties, and learning all the ins and outs, the ups and downs, the twists and mauls and tangles of crossed Italian handwriting. After that it became a settled thing for her to make her laborious way day by day to the York Place study to spend some hours at her task at the battered typewriter, and the tangled MSS., thankful beyond words for this wonderful boon of employment.

She did not always see Miss Jacques. That lady did most of her writing by night after Mary had gone, in the fumes of tobacco smoke, inspired, perhaps, by the sounds of cab whistles and hansom wheels that made her street merry after darkness fell. Her days she usually spent in museums, in libraries, at Somerset House, with the Hoydens for her headquarters. The routine was varied by sudden and violent flops into Mayfair, which she had, of course, a perfect right to enter, and where the great grim doors of duchesses opened gravely to receive her odd figure when it pleased her to command them to do so. And the infinite *esprit de corps* of her class precluded her from even being considered funny beyond a certain point at these relatives' houses.

"Oh, but of course Harriet is odd—she's so clever," a brilliant young duchess, of Petercastle make, would say, after one of these chance visits.

"That's so nice of her," a dowager would murmur. "There was nothing else for her to do, as she didn't marry."

"Anyhow, it's much better than gambling, and all that," a man would put in; "for women, I mean," he added hastily. He did not, naturally, wish to include Shakespeare, who probably would have been in much less mischief playing bridge for penny points.

The "chambers" at York Place were desperately hot, but Mary never dare dream of opening the windows, having strict injunctions not to do so. She would leave them when her work was done perfectly fagged and breathless, and convinced that if the Chevalier Jacques had only cultivated less curried mutton on staircases he need not have died an early death at all. She always blamed him for the windows and staircase. She could not have told why, for certainly he had not lived in York Place.

But to her patroness she was devoutly grateful, so much so that she was at a loss for words. And even had she had them

they would have been unwelcome, even, perhaps, regarded as offensive; for slowly she began to see that Miss Jacques' kindness to herself was actuated by a stern devotion to an ideal of her own, rather than to any sense of personal friendship. The ideal was the old feudal tradition of the lord's responsibility with regard to those who were under his sway: the baron and the thane, the prince and the vassal.

Too courteous to treat Mary as anything but a nominal equal, Miss Jacques clearly considered that she was fulfilling a duty with regard to her case, such as her ancestors would have deemed unavoidable, unquestionable. Through the ravages of her own warfare this vassal had suffered. It became her duty to restore to her all that was in her power.

Sometimes Mary was tempted to think that whatever she personally had been like, or however ungrateful she had been, Miss Jacques would have still fulfilled her own self-inflicted obligation by assisting her in this way; and on dark winter afternoons she would sometimes steal a furtive, almost yearning glance at that long equine, immovable face, as it pored sternly over ancient heraldic volumes, and great tomes of history, and wonder how far she was a part of her benefactor's ideal of class duty, and how far, ever so humbly, her friend.

One day Muriel Hyde visited the York Place chambers, one of the very, very few Hoydens who had ever been admitted there. Mary found her when she came to her duties one afternoon, after a long morning with other work, lounging back ungracefully in one of Miss Jacques' biggest and untidiest old musty chairs, smoking and laying down the law. Her boyish, fresh-coloured face under the tweed motor-cap, her hard, clear eyes, her decisive features, again struck Mary as handsome, and, now that she knew her better, oddly attractive.

"Hello!" cried the lady, still sprawling and waving her cigarette in hospitable manner. "How d'ye do, old comrade? What an age since you and I met!"

Mary went up and shook hands, her face expressing the pleasure she felt, a little shy of this most justly named Hoyden.

"Glad you're helping here," continued Miss Hyde, waving her cigarette airily towards the MSS. and the crystal cupid. "Declare she needs it. Hear you're most awfully clever and useful. D'you know," she sat up suddenly and looked Mary

squarely in the face with her handsome grey eyes, "I am ashamed of those Hoydens, for the trick they played you. Although it was my side did it, I'd like you to know from my own lips, and on my honour, I had nothing to do with it; didn't know how they were scheming, or what was up in the least."

"I know," said Mary, looking down at her eager flushed face. "You like 'fair play'; for that I shall never, never forget you!"

Muriel flopped back into the shabby chair with a jerk, a mask of entire impassiveness coming over her strong features, and contemplating her cigarette carefully, with something of the sulky look of a big boy really ashamed of himself.

"Sorry I didn't get it for you, then," she said, but Mary knew that she understood the allusion, and had in her own curt fashion accepted the inferential thanks. She crossed the room to her typewriting machine, half inclined to laugh at this original boy-woman. In the Hoyden days there had been no doubt in her mind, even without, as she thought, partially, that Miss Jacques and Miss Hyde were the inferior party in the arena, and Lady Jiberene and Miss Grogan the undoubted heroes. Yet, in her hour of distress, it was these two strange friends who had showered on her the best kindnesses in their power, though she had walked under their enemy's banner; one in the name of feudal pride, one in the name of fair play—both, it seemed to her, in Christian charity calling itself by other nick-names.

CHAPTER XX

"GOING to leave Rome, Mrs. Courtman, just when it is really beginning to be lively?" cried a voice out of the throng.

Florence was walking along the Via Gregoriana, looking wretched and ill. The vision of a Roman spring, of branching almond blossom, and sapphire skies, and strong lights and shadows cast on crumbling stone was in all its rapturous wonder about her, but she walked amongst it, ghostlike, unhappy, and absorbed.

"Lively?" Lent, you mean?" she said.

"Well, certainly. It's going to be crowded this year, I hear."

"Yes, so I believe. But I've had bad news from England."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Anything serious?"

"Oh, legal business—heaven knows the end of it. And I've been ill, Sir John. Rome doesn't suit me—look at those peasants! Do you believe in that?"

She and her companion were standing in the middle of the pathway, and on the kerb stood a vendor of small sacred images, vulgar matters of plaister and gaudy paint. His hat, pulled well over his brows, shaded a face clearly not Italian, possibly more the type of the commercial Belgian Jew. Oppressed by the strong sun, he suddenly pushed back his hat to wipe his brow, and though the action was only momentary, revealed a repulsive squint, eyes crossing and nearly meeting over the thick heavy nose. A passing peasant woman and her husband, catching this, immediately pointed at him with the extended first and second fingers of their hands spread out like horns, horror in their wide eyes, and following up this strange pantomime by crossing themselves rapidly and muttering as they hurried away.

"The evil eye?" said Sir John Hailey. "Ask me another! Do you?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I do. There seems to be one on me."

"Oh, nonsense, you're hipped. Come and see Ethel, and we'll get up some parties for you. We've only just arrived at our old villa, and I heard you were leaving to-day."

"Yes, thanks. I'll come to see Ethel. For I'm going back to England at once. I start to-morrow. I've had a long winter between Venice and here, and now I must make up for lost time, and go back to England without delay. Venice gave me low fever—wretched bog! There are lots of letters and business to attend to now I'm convalescent. I haven't read half of them."

She passed on, the smile conventionally called up on Sir John's behalf changing immediately to the settled frown of anxiety that she had worn before the encounter. Her eyes looked feverish and hard, and a peevish curl showed itself at the corners of her nose, that most unbecoming of temper's signals. She entered the door of her hotel languidly, shivering a little, in spite of the genial warmth. She was thinner, and looked older and more haggard, and was certainly not well. After fever in Venice, Rome had offered her all it could—friends, gaieties, lovely weather, ever magnificent religious pageants; but the strange inward conviction of an ever-dogging Nemesis at her heels had destroyed her chance of regaining her old night's rest, her freshest looks, and her sense of all enjoyment, driving her to a condition of reckless, restless searching that was becoming a monomania. And then a fresh trouble had come upon her, and for the first time her selfish habit of leaving letters unopened when she felt disinclined to read them was now to do her a bad turn, little expected.

Her indignant and culpable ignoring of Lady Jiberene's letter in the autumn, and even of Cartyn's, though it had brought a sense of wrathful triumph at the time, was now wreaking out a slow vengeance on her nerves and spirits; had been doing so for the last few months. She said to herself that here was Lent upon them—already preparations for the carnival week were making Rome gay, and drawing crowds of new arrivals—and she was not a bit happier or more at peace than she had been when, nearly a year go, she had sought the Church's forgiveness.

It was the Church she blamed. They were all the same, she said, these priests, her mind flying back to Cartyn. Hard, unimaginative, incapable of seeing any trouble or difficulty from any point of view but their own, and that such a horribly parochial one. After all the vicar of St. Chad's did not really know *her* world; to him it seemed perfectly easy to do impossible renouncing things, especially in theory, and naturally his advice was of no practical good, unless you were built like that too, and she wasn't.

"I told him I should never be churchy," said Florence, "except just in bits, now and then, and I never shall. But even the bits are going now." But a lapse in her correspondence had brought about suddenly a state of affairs to make her, if not "churchy," horribly anxious.

She had been deeply disappointed in Venice. Colonel Graydon had never come after all. It is true he had written to her, explaining—his plea was business—and she had had to make the best of that, and of the friends at whose villa she had elected to stay. But she was cross and offended with him for his lapse of gallantry, and spent hours in trying to account for it.

"I'm sure I looked my best when I last saw him," she mused. "It can't be that. That was a really excellent masseuse I had at the time—much better than the creature here! I know I hadn't a wrinkle. And my waist measured well, an inch less than it does now. And the colour I had my hair last summer was really nicer, taken altogether, than the horrid muddle it is now—green at the roots, unless I keep every nerve on it and fly to the man once a fortnight! What can have changed him? Some cat."

Then an illness followed, a trifling affair of malaria, but very weakening and depressing. In a fit of semi-invalid's sulks she had tossed aside all her letters and refused to read them, busying herself with her Italian friends.

But now, here in Rome, in the bright spring, she had very lazily begun to turn over this pile of disregarded correspondence. Amongst it there was another from Colonel Graydon:

"DEAR GIRL," it said, "I'm awaiting your return to this desolate country ever so anxiously. When are you coming, or are you ever coming? Nuisance I couldn't get out there in the winter,

but it was a fact that I was stuck in town, more or less. I've had nothing but legal business all the winter. By the by, do you remember that affair of poor Maurice Fresne's? Rather a wretched sort of business about a will, and his poor little wife? Tallard & Tallard have written to me about the re-investment of the poor girl's annuity money. Some parson has been to them about her, I hear. Seems she is in a bad way. I have to see them in a few days about the whole business. Wasn't she an old chum of yours? C. G."

She glanced at the date. The letter was weeks old. By this time he had learnt whatever there was to be learnt.

So was the cup of a newly discovered happiness dashed from poor Florence's lips, and in its place was a deep and bitter draught of anxiety and apprehension, deeper and far more bitter than any she had known; for now, not only might an old friendship be at stake, but a lover's regard.

What did he mean by Tallard & Tallard writing to him, and what was this about Cartyn having been to them? For, of course, "some parson" could only be he. There was no other interested in Mary. The letter was nearly two months old, and Colonel Graydon said he was to go to the solicitor's about Mary's money! Terrible as were her apprehensions, she could not quite believe as yet that Cartyn had deliberately betrayed her. What he had actually done she could not guess, except that in some way he had roused the suspicions of the trustees—that seemed as clear as daylight. How had he done it? In what way, by what casuistry, had he reconciled such a course with his conscience? And where would it end? Suspicions with lawyers—Florence's childlike faith in lawyers was only equalled by that she felt for religious teachers—might lead to discovery, to accusation, her evil conscience told her—accusation of herself; and if so, what would become of Graydon's regard for herself? If, before, the stakes were heavy, this letter had added infinite weight to them.

At all costs she must fly to England. Confused, uncertain as she was as to all that had been happening during the long winter, it was plain that with this imminent terror threatening her with immediate destruction she must at least be on the spot to combat her enemies.

"Mr. Cartyn behaved badly to me, but he is a good man—a good man," she kept saying to herself feverishly over and over again. "He wouldn't play a trick like this—he *couldn't*. He daren't. I know he is good, whatever I am, and however tiresome he is. No, no; it can't be that. It can't. If it were I would never believe in goodness again! But I must be wrong. I will go home and see what it is, what it means. I'll see Colonel Graydon at once, and find out what, how much he knows. I must! I must!"

It was a hot, still night after the perfect day, damp with miasmic dews and mists that had made even the idle Italian servants draw to the huge hideous "damask" curtains across the windows, curtains with yellow tassels, reminiscent, as are so many things Italian, of the begone "sixties" and "seventies." Florence pulled them apart and leaned out for a breath of air. Up out of the distant shadows of the far Campagna, awful and tomblike with the great ghostly arm of the Claudian Aqueduct winding across its dangerous wilderness, her dreary eyes stared vacantly at the weird prospect. She looked as old and faded and as out of date as the tawdry curtains draped round her, as though she, too, had mouldered there till her bloom had gone. She made a picture of a woman who had got her own way, done exactly as she liked from the very first, and paid for it in looks, peace of mind, gaiety, and health. It is a very common picture.

But she left for England the next day, determined not to bear her mad anxiety any longer.

Her first act on returning to London was to go straight to her solicitors, nominally intent on lesser business, but practically with a view of ascertaining once and for all whether they had so far received any communication from Messrs. Tallard & Tallard, Mary's solicitors. She was too nervous to ask outright in so many words, but her man of business made no mention of any fresh trouble beyond the small matter of speculative loss about which he had written to her, and she obliged to conclude that so far her enemies, as she now called them in her own rash mind, had not commenced any negotiations. How soon they might do so, however, was another matter. She actually had to see her lawyers before daring to communicate with Colonel Graydon; she had only replied to that letter of his which had cheered her from Venice, that she was coming back to

England in the early spring and had purposely, and in utter terror, avoided fixing any date. If, as he said in his letter, he was going to Messrs. Tallard & Tallard's on the matter of Mary's money, and that immediately after they had had an interview with Cartyn, she dare not guess how much he might know by the time she arrived in town again! But now that she had arrived, desperation, the desperation that is born of long-gnawing, maddening fear, made her set to work to find out the worst with all the sang-froid of the already condemned. From her own solicitors she went on to her club to lunch; they had taken up her morning—or, that bit of the forenoon that her toilet allowed over for the thing she called morning—and now she must think out her next move. Her club was a smarter affair altogether than the Hoydens', and was distinguished by very delicate and chaste eighteenth century decorations of rather a chilly character. You needed a poker-shaped back for the gilt and tapestry chairs, and nobody dreamed of smoking; neither did anybody dream of knowing anybody else, but rather sat round on the gold thrones at teatime judging others from under deeply suspicious brows. These were less women who "did things" than women who waited for other people to do them. But for this scrutiny Mrs. Courtman cared absolutely nothing. She had friends enough without hunting for them at clubs, she said, and only came here for peace and quiet, or to write letters, or telephone. But even the unapproachable ones on the stiff chairs noticed that she looked wretchedly ill and miserable—even they knew her by sight, and that she had apparently added years on to her age during that time out of England. Ladies who could not afford or manage to go abroad for long stays themselves reflected upon this fact with some real satisfaction, and studied poor Florence's thinned features and jaded eyes, under which dark marks showed, and noted her feverish worried ways and manner of speaking with a righteous British feeling of superior virtue and superior insularity. That most bewildering of feminine logic—the assumption that I am better-looking and virtuous, because somebody else looks ill and cross—must have contributed greatly to the self-congratulation of Florence's club-fellows at such a period!

She was trying, over lunch, at which she grumbled, to make up her mind whether she would go and see Cartyn and openly

demand the truth from him, or motor over to Sheen to Colonel Graydon's, and under the cover of light chatter find out if he had heard anything. The question was, if he had, would the chatter be so very light? Good gracious! suppose he knew already what must he think of her! Oh, she must see him at all risks at once; she would soon tell from his manner if he knew. He was a man of strict honour; he would despise her too much to help showing it if he did, in spite of his courtesy and kindness to her sex. Well, she would get it over. She finished her lunch and took a cab back to Darnley Gardens, there ordering her motor to be in readiness to go to Sheen. It must be owned, then, that she dressed herself up in some of her finest attire. Womanlike, she had a sneaking idea that if she looked very pretty indeed, her judge, even if he did know the full extent of her perfidy, would not be able to be so very angry, at any rate, not quite so angry. It took her and a badgered maid quite a long time to select that costume, for though it was a fine March day, it was bitterly cold, and a bracing east wind met one at corners. Her dress, which was a beautiful soft lavender, to be worn under a sable motor-coat, had a special hat belonging to it, but now the question worried Florence as to whether that hat looked quite penitent? It turned down very much in the front, and was a dream of shaded blues in massed hyacinths, a very smart French thing. The question was do you look as sorry and appealing with your hat turned down over your nose, as you do with the brim turned up wistfully, revealing a sweet yearning countenance? Florence tried with a hand-mirror and made faces at herself to see. This is all the more characteristic of her as she really was in trouble. With her it was always impossible for any sane person to tell where acting left off and reality began, but certainly at that anxious moment she was perfectly serious. The turned down, leghorn-shaped hat, striking her as a little too coy and suggestive of bright eyes peeping up under it, like Maud Muller in her hay field—she sent for a toque, lavender in tone too, and with a few white roses on it; this headgear set further back on the head and showed her brow, from which Florence now made her woman put back her hair a little.

"Yes, that will do," she said, critically to herself. "But strings would improve it. You can't be quite so sorry in a

toque as you can in a bonnet. Adele," to the maid, "fetch me some of that tulle, the lilac that we got for those scarves."

This was brought, and she proceeded to put it over the little toque, pinning it at the top with a jewelled pin, and gathering up the ends under her chin in a Quaker-like bow that was certainly very becoming.

"I'm glad I do look ill!" she said, as she glanced back at the chaste vision. "It goes with the bonnet, anyhow."

So armed she set off to Sheen. If any person especially gifted with common sense, or what is perhaps a truer name for some of it, common censoriousness, here condemns poor Florence for levity and want of any real feeling, let me point out that on her way to Sheen, hidden in her motor, she cried a little to herself; it may be in self-pity, but it was, so far as it went, real feeling.

But arrived at "Wrayfords" she pulled herself together, and whirled up Colonel Graydon's pretty cedar drive quite jauntily. A bitter disappointment awaited her. He was away golfing in Norfolk, said his man; he was not expected home for a day or two. Alas, for the Quaker bonnet!

She came away with more worry at her heart than the wasted toilet warranted, or even the certainty of having to wait interminably before she really knew her fate. For she now recollected that Mary's other trustees beside Mr. Tallard and Colonel Graydon, Mr. Ardleigh, was a great golfer and had some fine links in Norfolk—had he, by any chance gone down to see him over this wretched business? It looked uncommonly like it, and if so she might as well give up all hope.

She was doomed to disappointment again, for when she called at St. Chad's Vicarage, Mr. Cartyn was away too, had gone down to a Lenten retreat, said his servant, a day or two ago. He would not be back for a week.

She was now so worked up to such a fever of longing to know something that she felt she would go mad unless she came to some conclusion before another night went over her head, and, as she sat considering, she recollected that there was one other source to which she could apply—the solicitors. And then the bonnet would not be wasted either, since even lawyers are men, and they might by its means be reduced to giving her at least a hint of the information she wanted.

It was rapidly growing dark, towards the close of a typical English spring day, and she dashed down to Whitehall, the great white globes of electric light amongst the dark trees were like staring skull faces along her worried path.

The head of the firm of Messrs. Tallard & Tallard had not left though the afternoon was late. Yes, he would see Mrs. Courtman for a few moments. She was shown almost at once into a dark wainscoted room with a low ceiling and deep embrasured window, the last remains of what had once been a riverside mansion like "Wrayfords" dreamy centuries ago, when the view from its lattices was of gardens and terraces and river; not, as now, backyards, with caretakers' washing hung out to dry, and nobody's cats fighting on the protruding leads. Once the home of courtiers, it was now devoted to another and more serious order of court, and bore its subjection with a stately, sullen dignity that only an exquisite Adam mantelpiece, covered with law-books and wafer boxes, seems able to display; a lesson in dignity, even offended dignity, which might well be taken to heart by the wretched vandalism of the age—if it had one.

Florence, intent on her errand and incidentally upon her bonnet, was happily unconscious of any such nonsensical, out-of-date ideas, and entered the august presence of the head of Tallard & Tallard, a gentleman strongly resembling an Airedale terrier, iron-grey and perky, with much more eye to her own effect than to that of his Adam's mantelpiece, or his Grinling Gibbons ceiling covered with spider webs.

She apologised for her intrusion. It was to ask a favour that she had come (here the tulle bonnet strings came into wistful effect.) A little favour—a mere matter of courtesy.

Were they not the solicitors to a Mrs. Fresne, the widow of Marcus Fresne, Esquire, late of Bahore?

The grave-faced perky gentleman at the desk bowed assent. Mrs. Courtman proceeded to say that she was an old friend of that lady's. She had been away, but—er—she had heard that Mrs. Fresne had changed her place of abode, and that a—er—clergyman, also a mutual friend, had been here to Messrs. Tallard & Tallard's on business connected with her?

"Yes," the lawyer agreed, that was certainly so.

"And," Florence went on, twiddling about with her gloves in an innocent manner, "as Mr. Cartyn is a friend of mine I should

be exceedingly obliged if you will tell me—er—the nature of his business; a matter,” she added hastily on getting a sharp stare. “which I could easily find out for myself by applying to him only that he happens to be away in a retreat, whatever that means, and cannot be communicated with.”

The lawyer, who had been most courteously “sizing” the lady from the very first, including, oh alas! that exceedingly Quaker bonnet, now asked her very neatly and in as few words as possible why she did not await Mr. Cartyn’s return from the retreat and ask him personally, since the matter was merely one of friendship?

“Oh no,” said Florence, in her hurry forgetting her ever-vague sense of caution and plunging impulsively into a betrayal of her own anxiety. “I could not wait till then. Mr. Cartyn is not expected to be home for a week, and I am most particularly anxious to—to understand the whole proceeding before then!”

The lawyer smiled to himself as he tapped his desk lightly with a ruler. This good lady was positively childish.

“You cannot suppose, madam,” he said, “that I am at liberty even if I wished, to give to you, a stranger, a full account of the nature of my business with this gentleman. I fear it is utterly, quite utterly against all rule or precedent for me to do so. I do not wish to appear discourteous, but——”

“Oh dear. How tiresome all you people are!” cried Florence. “You’re all one mass of red tape. Well, do then just tell me one thing, which I am sure is in no way letting out any horrid legal secrets, or anything bothering like that—did this gentleman, Mr. Cartyn, make any disclosure to you concerning the lady in question?”

The lawyer’s brows contracted, and his simply amused look faded into one of searching scrutiny and suspicion.

“Again I must entirely decline to reply,” he said, a trifle of sternness creeping into his tone.

Florence shook her furs and feathers crossly and impatiently.

“Very well, then—one more question. Did he refer to her husband’s will in any way, and to the manner in which it was left?”

Again a gleam came into the legal eye, and the curt legal voice said—

"Madam, once and for all I cannot reply to your question." He stared at her steadily and sternly. Florence's worried eyes were caught and held by his for the space of a few seconds. Good heavens, had he even now answered with his eyes, when his lips had refused consent? A wave of horror swept over Florence's anxious heart. He must know something to look at her like that. She had not missed a single glance of his eye and turn of his changing expressions, and they all pointed most clearly to the fact that he had a hidden store of knowledge, that he was primed with some secret strength and resisting power that was full of infinite menace. She rose to go, angry, terrified, and deeply disappointed. The Airedale terrier picked up her card which had been lying on his desk in front of him, placed there by his clerk, and glanced at it again.

"Mrs. Courtman—ah!—of Darnley Gardens, late of Bahore?" he said. "Indeed! I am exceedingly sorry, madam, but I hardly realised your name and personality when you entered the office. I am indeed sorry that I am unable to oblige you with any information."

Florence bowed the Quaker bonnet in a storm of inward indignation, and swept noisily out of the legal presence. She re-entered her motor and fled away, in far worse case than before.

She must fill up her time somehow, she said. She had one ghastly sleepless night after that busy, unprofitable day, and then she plunged headlong into as many diversions as she could reasonably think of, and these were not hard to seek. Several of her friends were in town, and she made for their society with eager haste, covering up as well as she could the gnawing pain of anxiety that was ruining her comfort and her rest.

Then at last came the day of Cartyn's return. He was not to be back till the evening, and she filled up the afternoon by going to a palmist's in Bond Street. Even the palmist's usual information about there being two men—"a man and a dark man—and a woman who is false to you, do not trust her," was filled with new meaning for her! She was often captious and hard to satisfy when visiting these oracles, but to-day the ancient fiat seemed vividly dramatic, full of desperate ulterior meaning. Oh, that dear dark man! How familiar a puppet he is on such stages, yet how sure he is of belief, even respect.

Florence came out from the portals of the augury still trying

to decide, between Colonel Graydon and Mr. Cartyn, which was the dark man and which was only the man. As they were both rather dark, and both certainly men, this was not easy.

She dashed out to her carriage in her own special rushing fashion, with her silks, as George Herbert most charmingly puts it, "whistling," out into the damp evening air, east wind, and streaks of rain, when she ran headlong into two persons. In drawing back in apology she saw that one was Miss Jacques and behind her Mary Fresne!

For a second the horse-like countenance under the hearse-like toque of the elder lady simply glared shortsightedly at her.

Then she said—

"Why, Florence!—you in town?"

"Why, it's Harriet! Yes, I am. I wish I wasn't. How do you do?" to Mary, who instinctively drew back in the shadow.

"Well, I'm glad to see it," snapped Harriet Jacques, "at last! You've done a good bit of harm to some of us over here, by your goings on. Really, Florence, I know all about it, and it's too bad. Fair play's fair play. You know it is. No, you needn't hide yourself, Mrs. Fresne!" She turned again to Florence. "They behaved shockingly to her at the Hoydens, but she is kindly helping me now, as my secretary. Mrs. Fresne is very clever—very. Her help is a privilege. My dear Florence, I've got a bone to pick with you. Without altogether meaning it you've done serious harm. But I'm going to have the matter put right."

"Oh, Harriet, for goodness' sake don't begin scolding! I've got worries enough. I'm going now to see a parson."

"A parson? Ah! Mr. Cartyn?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, I've no doubt he's expecting you," said Miss Jacques with fearful significance.

"Expecting me? But——"

"Yes. You will see."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, never mind!"

Before Florence could grasp her by the arm Miss Jacques and her companion had disappeared in the crowd and were lost to her.

She stood in the rain gazing after their shadows in speechless horror.

CHAPTER XXI

SHE tumbled somehow into her carriage and gave the direction for St. Chad's Vicarage.

Lost! Betrayed! Made use of by this man, by these people.

She saw it all now. The presence of Mary with Miss Jacques proved it beyond a doubt. They were all of them in a conspiracy against her. Was ever a woman so shockingly treated, so cruelly used?

Driving home through the wintry night, she recollected Mary's cold greeting, her attempt to hide herself, her refusal of the proffered hand. It all pointed to the one thing. Mary had been so friendly when she last saw her; now she was changed, she had learned the truth, and they were plotting to get her rights. Of course Cartyn was in it, must be in it; that was why he had gone to the lawyers.

Doubtless he had made this arrangement for Mary to be with Harriet Jacques, and they were going to use their knowledge to reinstate her at any cost to Florence. Guilty as she was herself, prime schemer and betrayer and liar, Florence's whole heart now rose in a passion of disappointment and indignation at Cartyn's falsity, his deceit, his betrayal. She did not know it, but she had clung to the notion of his goodness with all her might and main. He, at least, had been to her a type of something nobler and better than herself. He had himself taken in her confused spiritual imagination, the place of Christian science, of spiritualism, of palmistry even; in a sense he had ousted them all by the force of his personality, and the fact that he stood to her for the living type of goodness. His fall, his utter, hopeless fall, was then the more hideous to her, and with it fell now her own vague desire for better things. To come home lonely and ill for this!

"A conspiracy, a trio, against me!" she said. "A plot, formed out of my own voluntary confession, carefully laid against me.

The meanness of it! I will go to him and accuse him of what he has done. To think that I should come back with a desire to do something decent, something at least fair in this awful business, to find the man who has inspired me a traitor, a broken, wretched betrayer of others' secrets, and of his own honour!"

She burst into the ready tears that were her usual refuge, but her bitter disappointment was for once entirely free from subconscious melodrama. This time it was real misery that shook the gaudy figure in that stuffy brougham, the misery of one who yearns to find a foothold, and finds the rock slipping, shattering under his feet. If poor Cartyn had needed convincing of the sacred responsibility of his office, he should have seen the picture of this, the worst of his disciples, weeping tears of blind misery for his fall. In those long, never-to-be-forgotten hours of his temptation, in the glorying hope of expedient advice from his fellows, in the wild, irrational demands of his yearning, eager love, he should have had presented to him suddenly the spectacle of the erring woman who had caused all his travail, weeping over his lost honour.

And what would she do if the worst had happened? She had wild, confused ideas of writing to the bishop, of ruining him as a clergyman, of starting a lawsuit, a libel case, something, anything to defend herself from the publicity and exposure of her idle fault, which his betrayal would bring. She forgot, in her heat and rage and fear that the publicity of such a cause would be far worse than anything he could devise.

She leant out now in the snowy blast, and directed her coachman to drive not to Darnley Gardens, but to St. Chad's Vicarage. She would demand, she would insist on an interview.

Arrived at the Glastonbury door, dimly lighted by its iron-framed lamp, she found on inquiry that the vicar was not in.

"Are you *sure*?" she said.

"Sure, m'm? Yes," said the man. "This is his hour for the service of the Rescue Guild and workers. It's early, because those folk lives some distance and have got to get back in good hours."

"I see. Then he is at the church?"

"Yes, m'm."

"When will he be in—what time?"

"Don't know, m'm. He often has other meetings after a service like this?"

Florence considered a moment, then decided that she would catch him more certainly by going round to the church herself. She must see him to-night. So she drove round to St. Chad's sending her coachman home, and saying that she would take a cab after the service. He need not return. It was a dreadful night for the horses, she said.

Then she went in. She had expected a half-lighted church, and a handful of persons—what had the vicarage servant said—Rescue people?—yes, something very serious. But to her amazement the church was fully lighted up, and quite full of people—the service had begun—and they were busily singing a rousing hymn with the assistance of a large choir. Her own brilliant appearance, the effect of her costly dress, duly impressed the verger, who, against her will, insisted on parading her right up the middle of the big church amongst all the people, and putting her in a prominent seat. He had always an eye to decorative effect, even more marked than that directed towards main chances; and mere whispering commands or appeals for an obscure seat by a well-dressed woman passed over him as so much useless chatter to be entirely disregarded.

But Florence managed by creeping and climbing past several people to get herself into a darker corner by a pillar, from which she could see without being too clearly seen. People stared at her a little—they were mostly women—her red eyes contrasted oddly with her sumptuous garb, and her presence at such a service looked rather odd. They themselves were mostly social workers of various sorts, or ladies sincerely interested in women's work, who took their places behind the lines of front pews, where sat the women of the Rescue Guild, a grave band of heavy-faced beings in dark blue uniform.

The warmth, the dazzling light, the swing of the tune for a moment or two dazzled Florence's senses after the storm outside, but when she collected herself a little her eyes sought Carryn in the clergy stalls. To her disappointment he was not there. She saw the fair head of the finger-tipped Mr. Renel, the dark head of the belligerent Manxman, his fellow-curate, and in the vicar's seat an elderly man, with iron-grey hair, stooping over his book.

"Some special preacher," she said, annoyed now that she had come at all. However, she decided to leave before the sermon—she marked, with the tail of her eye, an easy way out to the side which would make her exit comparatively unnoticed.

The last hymn before the sermon was drawing to a close; she collected her various properties, her cloak, and many small possessions, and was about to glide quietly out, when she glanced up and saw that the preacher was already ascending the pulpit steps. Something in his walk, the stoop of his grey head arrested her attention, and she looked again—why, it was Cartyn himself! She had not known him! In utter amazement she sat down when the people did, and relinquished all idea of hurrying away, her eyes fixed on the face of the man before her. How changed a face! It was not a year ago since she had last seen him, and he looked ten years older. What was it? His hair, then just sprinkled with iron-grey, was now all changed to that one colour; his face had fallen in and sharpened, his eyes seemed set in deeper sockets, and his mouth seemed to have tightened and hardened; but it was not these things only that made the difference. That gallant, almost jaunty bearing that had been characteristic of him was gone, and in its place was a slow, deliberate gravity, almost preoccupation, that gave him the appearance of greatly added years.

"He's been ill," thought Florence. "He never told me! Good gracious, what a change!"

"Ugh! that he should look such a saint," she meditated; "a man who can break his word for a woman! He does look a saint—it's that thin face and that hair, I suppose. That is what they are all like, these parsons, when you really know them—dignified to look at, but how weak and false!"

Then some words of his caught her ear—words about the sacred trusts of womanhood. He was dwelling on the entire meaning, the awful significance of a trust, what it may do to raise, how it may curse. He was giving examples. Florence's anger leaped forth like a forked flame. That he should dare to talk so, he who was above all men false to his trust, to stand up there before those hundred of eager eyes and ears and give his false advice, his noble-sounding counsel with that on his own conscience! Her anger made her deaf to his words; they only came in upon her now and again like gusts of sound

blown in forcibly by the wind. It was a long sermon, but it did not seem long to Florence, so busy was she concocting speech after speech that she would make him to his condemnation. To passionate natures there is a sort of rash, horrible enjoyment in a tornado of anger, a fiercely powerful elation, succeeded of course by the very blackness of depression and shame; but for its little day a kind of glory. Florence was feeling that now. She was glorying in the fact that she could and would injure, lacerate this man, expose his hypocrisy, reveal him as he stood in all his wretched weakness.

When at last it was all over, and the congregation swept out, leaving the hot church empty, she made application to see the vicar. She went right up to the vestry door in her fear of missing him, and was only kept out by Tolley's sternly croaked advice to her to let the "poor dear choirmen disrobe in peace." Then, when this was accomplished, she went in, Tolley showing her into the inner vestry and shutting the door. There she stood, face to face with Cartyn, who himself stood perfectly still gazing at her, utterly taken aback by her sudden and startling presence. He had not seen her in church, and now her unexpected appearance stunned him, and all that she signified to him at that moment seemed to rush suddenly upon him with overwhelming force; and he stood looking at her with his worn eyes and white face, still wearing his cassock, one hand on the table over which he had been bending to sign the offertory entry when she had burst in upon his privacy.

Florence spoke first. "So you have broken your word," she said. Her accents fell low and haughtily, but her hands trembled so violently that she could hardly hold her books or muff.

"What are you saying?" he asked, his voice hollow and pained.

"You know. I need not go any further. You promised so much—and now it is all, all broken, betrayed. I would not have believed it—even for her!"

"What have I done? Will you tell me?" he said sternly, his voice rising. This was a new thing, that Florence, who had been the cause of all his and Mary's suffering, should take the line of accuser to him!

"It is no good trying to hide it," Florence went on, her words rushing furiously one over the other. "I know most of it. I can guess the rest. You have betrayed the secret I

put into your keeping to Mary Fresne's friends, for the sake of the love you have for her. Hush!" she put up her hand "don't try to contradict. I have just come from hearing myself attacked, accused of this, by the woman you have chosen to help you, Harriet Jacques!"

"You are beside yourself," he said, but his face was very white. "Who is Harriet Jacques?"

"Who? You know her—you must."

"I do not. I have never seen her. What are you talking about, Mrs. Courtman?"

"But," gasped Florence, "you must know her—she can only have got it from you. She had Mary Fresne with her——"

He suddenly interrupted her.

"What?" he cried. "Mary Fresne—where—when? You have seen her?"

"Yes, yes. Just now—with Miss Jacques."

"Where—but where?"

"Oh, out in Brompton Road. But you must know all about it, Mr. Cartyn. Mary is her secretary——"

"Then you have found her—you know where she lives?" He spoke excitedly.

"Yes, of course—why——?"

He sat down and laid his head on his arm on the table.

"Thank God!" he said, breathing heavily. "Thank God!" Florence stood gazing at him. What was this? He did not know where Mary lived? He was overcome at hearing she was "found," as he called it. What did it all mean?

"Didn't you know where she lived?" she asked, but more gently. The bent head embarrassed her. Things seemed changing oddly.

"Know? She has been lost for months," he answered, without looking up.

"Lost?"

"She left here of her own accord—for my sake." He had sat up now and was leaning back in his chair, his hands pushed out straight before him and gripping the table, his eyes luminous and staring straight before him, not at her.

"For your sake, Mr. Cartyn? I don't understand."

"You are no stranger to us. I loved her, and she me. We could not marry—she would not, with that about her neck. So

she went away, poor, selfless mistaken girl, to save what she thought was my—position!” He laughed bitterly. “It has nearly killed me.” He said it simply enough, but his face bore out his words.

“Was that—that I told you of, all that stood between?” Florence said, her voice lower.

“All? Of course. What else could there be?”

“But you went to Tallard & Tallard’s, the solicitors?”

He looked up with a sort of grim smile.

“I know I did. Why?”

“But you surely——”

“Ah, is that your thought! Well, I will confess. I went, in my misery at her loss, to ask for her address. They would not give it to me.”

“Well?”

“That was a black moment. I can’t say any more. I can only thank God, that at such a moment, I held my tongue. I did hold it. I said nothing. That’s all. Well?”

“You held your tongue? You did nothing—even then?”

“No.”

“And you didn’t tell—in your own defence and hers?”

“How could I, I tell you? You had tied my hands.” He got up now and went and stood by the fireplace.

Florence gazed at him now, her eyes growing larger as the truth dawned upon her at last.

“But—you could have justified her!”

“I could—with dishonour.” He was looking in the fire.

“By telling the truth to the trustees.”

“Yes.”

“But, surely—that time when you were actually in the presence of the solicitors you did something, said something? I have seen them myself. I wanted them to tell me what had passed, but they would not. Their manner was so odd. I felt sure——”

“Did you? Their manner may have been odd because they had strange recollections of my visit! I remember I went there and fairly stormed at them, telling them of her poverty, and the miserable life she was living. I don’t suppose they thought I was quite sane. I wasn’t.”

“But did you only go there for her address?”

"No—shall I tell you? I *went to betray you*. That is my condemnation. I was capable of getting so near to it as that! Mary gave me a letter she found from you to her husband. I meant to show it to the trustees, and tell all I knew. I sank to that. How I was only just saved from it, Heaven alone knows!"

"My letter? And when I heard from Colonel Graydon that you had been to them, and he worried me about her money, was that all he meant?"

"That she was starving? Yes, that was all. I told them to tell him."

"I see. Then that was why he wrote to me as he did! He simply meant that he wanted to find out some way to help her."

Cartyn bowed. "I suppose so. I do not know him, and of course never wrote to him. But I believed that he would hear of my visit to the lawyers."

"But, good heavens!" said Florence, her voice breathless, and throwing down all her little clattering treasures, books, purses, chatelaines on the table in her impatience; "I cannot understand it all, all at once, I cannot, indeed. I have just come back to England. You wrote to me about her. I was bitterly to blame that I did nothing then. I admit that. But, oh, I never knew—believe me when I say I never even guessed the awful trouble I should bring upon you. I might well be miserable! You two! You two! Good heavens, what a struggle! And Mary poor and ill!"

"Yes, Mary poor and ill," he repeated quietly.

"You could bear that?"

"I bore it."

Florence suddenly threw out both her hands.

"Oh, you couldn't have loved her!" she cried.

He was looking back at her steadily.

"What do you say?" he said in stern accents. "I couldn't have loved her? I couldn't have loved her? I who would have died for her! Can't you see I'm a man broken by sleepless nights and hopeless questions for her sake? Can't you tell what it has cost me? Bah! If you can't what's the use of talking of it!"

Florence drew back, shuddering a little at the awful earnestness of his words and the look of his tense, worn face.

"Love would have gone to the rescue," she muttered dully. "After all—if you had betrayed—it would have been quite natural and human."

"Love craved to go to the rescue, as you put it; love struggled to do that in the night. But love is higher than that; it has its altars. I could have saved Mary if I would, but only to lose her. Look here, Mary loved me for what I should have been. For her sake I kept to her belief in me. Now," he looked at her from under his brows doggedly, "what have you to say?"

"Oh, don't look at me so! Oh, do forgive me! Is love like that? Is love so great?"

"Hers is," he said.

Florence wrung her hands together as she stood before him.

"The whole trouble began through love," she said, "and jealousy."

"Yes."

"You have shown me love and heroism."

"*She* has," he said.

"I'm trying to understand your part in it. I can't take it in all at once. If you did nothing wrong why are you so unhappy about it all? You talk as though you were guilty."

He threw up his head and laughed shortly.

"Why do I take it to heart? Don't you see that when you and I first met, Mrs. Courtman, you confessed to me a sin that I despised but could not comprehend? Don't you see now that within a year of that day I have learnt what that sin meant? That, as nearly as possible, I have committed it myself? The sin of betrayal. As it is I cannot say 'nearly' even, for I did. I have betrayed you to Mary. It is odd that within one year our positions are reversed, and in this very vestry I am confessing to you!"

He looked at her with the odd trick of half-shutting his eyes. His face was infinitely sad and drawn in spite of it.

But Florence's hard, worried eyes filled with tears. She looked at him, standing there by the empty fireplace. His cassock, somehow as a sign of his office, made his words seem more humble.

"Oh no, no, but indeed you need not."

"I prefer to. It makes us nearer together. It is you who

have helped me. You have taught me that I am human. You have taken down my conceit finally. Shake hands—we are the same sort of beings, you and I, and we will try to help one another.”

Florence went to him and put her hand in his. In that moment her selfishness slipped from her. His unselfishness had broken it down—a thing all his precepts had not been able to do. Just in that same moment he became the mighty power that a year ago he had imagined himself to be—with what results! Standing against his vestry mantelpiece, holding her hand and looking down at her with his worn dark face, in the act of offering her his own humiliation, as he thought, he held, for the first time in his life, the power to help her and lead her to something better.

The confident official was no more. This indeed was a man—sinful, kindly, ashamed. At last truly a priest in that he had learned to reverence the struggles of unhappy humanity, the highest priesthood.

Florence pulled away her hand and pushed back her veil. She gave herself a huge shake, like a spaniel coming out of the water—almost a struggle. She disarranged the tulle strings unconsciously. Eagerly she said—

“I am an unhappy wretch. I am very sorry. I don’t want the Church’s forgiveness in the way I did, any more. I want to do something—as nice—as you have. Yes, really. I used to be so sorry, I cried. Now I can’t cry. I want to do things, not talk any more. Good, daring things: strong, kind things. Do you remember, a year ago, you and I stood here just where we are standing now? (only I was in violet—I was so religious last Lent) do you remember?”

“I do. Yes.”

“I couldn’t get any peace, and you said that there was no peace without reparation.”

“I did.”

“Well then, there *is* no peace. You are right. I have tried everything. Listen,” she said, putting up her hand as he was going to interrupt her, “I am not talking about bridge luck now—I’m talking about serious things. I must. I’m talking in the presence of a good, true man.”

“Oh, please, Mrs. Courtman——”

"No, I must tell you. I say you've taught me what unselfishness really is—you and Mary. When I see what others can do and suffer through me, I'm not—not quite such a miserable wretch but that it makes me at least feel ashamed of my own part. Will you accept it now"—her voice went lower, and her breast heaved painfully—"if I make the reparation? If I write out a statement for the trustees—to-night?"

He came across to her, his face flushed at the spectacle of her struggling generosity.

"You must act on your own conscience—you must do nothing for me—as a man."

"Mr. Cartyn, you must learn to take the good you can get out of—us sinners; not to muddle it up by fancy terms. If I have seen—see God in you, and—yes—in Mary's unselfishness and courage, you must not quarrel with me. We cannot all be so very churchy, you know. We live in one another, if we're worth anything. I *am* sorry, honestly, for this miserable business. But I shall only make the reparation because—because, now you're a real person, not only a clergyman, it seems easier to be good, somehow. It is so nice of you to be human, like me. So I'll try to be heroic, like you."

He took her hand in silence.

"Come home with me," she added, "and help me to write it out. We will do it together."

"And you have come into some money?" said Miss Jacques. "Well, that is very fortunate."

"Yes—well, some has reverted to me," said Mary, her eyes shining, her face beaming and looking girlish again in the glory of her news, as she sat in those muddly "chambers" and told it to Miss Jacques over the litter of MSS. and the shoes and treasures and the cigarette ash.

"I have heard from the lawyers, and it has all come right—I mean come to me most wonderfully."

"Then perhaps I need say no more to that Florence Courtman," said her friend casually. "I mean about that letter of Lady Jiberene's about you that she never answered. It was an unjust action. It caused you endless trouble, casting such a slight upon you. It was even a very rude way to treat the monster Jiberene. Even women like that should be replied

to. Courtesy demands it, however annoying they are. I told her I would get justice in the matter that night we met her. If you still would like, my dear——”

“Oh no—oh, please,” said Mary. “It is most kind of you, dear Miss Jacques, but it doesn’t in the least matter. I’d rather no more was said about it. Lady Jiberene has forgotten it all by now, or will forget it.”

“Oh, certainly, now you are to enjoy a large income. That will be quite in her style.”

“Oh, I am not likely to see her,” said Mary; “but if I do, I need not be cross with her. After all, she always liked my respectable side, didn’t she? And now I am proved respectable, she will really rejoice.”

“Quite so,” said Miss Jacques. “But, you know, I liked you best when you weren’t, didn’t I?”

“You did, in deed. But I hope you won’t cut me when I’m a vicar’s wife?”

“No; not as the vicar appears to be a chivalrous person.”

There was a sound of eager footsteps on the stairs, and the door opened, and Cartyn came into the room, his eyes shining, his hands held out before him.

“James!” cried a rapturous voice.

“Mary—sweetheart!” There was a whirling meeting.

“I’ll cut you for the present,” said Miss Jacques, retiring from the room with the air of the Louis Phillipe beauty in pink silk.

“To two, cuts are kindnesses.”

THE END

**A
Shepherd
of
Kensington**



**By
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